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WHAT IS GOD LIKE?

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WHAT IS GOD LIKE?

AN ATTEMPT AT AN ANSWER

BY

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BISHOP OF WINCHESTER

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" Religion is the first thing and the last thing, and until a man has found God and been found by God he begins at no beginning, he works to no end. He may have his friendships, his partial loyalties, his scraps of honour. But all these things fall into place, and life falls into place, only with God."

H. G. WELLS.

" To the first ultimate instinct, to God we hold."

W. H. SORLEY (killed in the Great War at the age of 20).

I AM well aware that to ask and to attempt an answer to such a question as the one which forms the title of this book may seem impertinent, if not almost irreverent. But there are scores of persons who, unless the matter can be put before them simply and shortly, will give up all hope of an answer. They have neither the time nor the opportunity for prolonged thought or for extensive reading. And though to the philosopher or the scholar a book like this may seem woefully inadequate, yet its very simplicity may, from the point of view of the average man, be its virtue. For I have mainly had in mind not so much regular members of the Church, as those persons—and there are many young people among them—who feel instinctively that life's meaning depends upon the answer to this question; who want to "do their bit" in the service of their fellows but are not quite sure of their foundation. If I could help a Sixth Form boy, or a girl leaving school, or a young man starting

out in life, or a worker who is too busy to read many books, I should be glad indeed.

My debt to other and better thinkers is plain enough, not least to the works of Dr. Streeter. My only actual collaborator has been my brother, the Vicar of Croydon, who has been kind enough to read through the proof-sheets and has made many valuable suggestions.

For quotations from the Bible I have used in almost every case Dr. Moffatt's well-known translation.

THEODORE WINTON:

February, 1928.

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WHAT IS GOD LIKE?

THE MOST POWERFUL THING IN THE WORLD

Chapter I

"What liberty and prosperity depend upon are the souls of men and the spirits—which are the men. The mind is the man."

OLIVER CROMWELL.

"Il me faut, comme à l'univers, un Dieu, qui me sauve du chaos et de l'anarchie de mes idées. . . . Son idée délivre notre esprit de ses longs tourments, et notre cœur de sa vaste solitude."

RIVAROL.

WHAT is the most powerful thing in the world? That question at once conjures up mind-pictures of bombs and battleships, of guns and explosives. It is none of these things. They are merely instruments. Behind them is the mind that uses them. And their use, or disuse, will depend on the ideas in that mind. Therefore the powerful thing in the world is an idea. Behind the ships at Boulogne, waiting for the invasion of England more than a hundred years ago, was the mind of Napoleon. The prevailing idea in that mind was the domination of Europe. Less than twenty years ago there streamed across that same narrow

passage tens of thousands of men. They were going in the opposite direction. In their minds, too, there was a prevailing idea—to protect Europe from another domination and to safeguard the freedom of the land they loved. The white cemeteries of Flanders and of Gallipoli are silent witnesses to the immeasurable power of a great idea.

And the greater the idea the more potent is its influence. As we look back over the centuries we see that the idea which has exercised more influence than any other on the minds of men has been the idea of God. You have only to cast your eye over the world's most famous buildings to see how true this is. The temples of Egypt, of Greece, and of South India; the glories of Mohammedan art in places like Delhi and Agra; the cathedrals and churches of Europe—all these are outward and visible signs that of all the ideas which have entered the mind of man, that which has moved him to his highest achievements—and sometimes, it must be confessed, to his most sanguinary wars—has been his idea of God. That idea has often been faulty, incorrect, unworthy, but it has been none the less powerful. I was impressed with this as I scanned

the crowds on the river-bank at Benares, men and women who in scores of cases had tramped many hundreds of miles to bathe in the sacred stream; or as I watched the pilgrims in the temple enclosure at Kandy who had come to do homage to the Sacred Tooth.

Still more is this true when we look nearer home and mark the effects of Christian ideas in Europe. It was essentially his idea of God and God's love that captured "the little brother of Assisi," and through him set on foot a movement which sweetened and ennobled life for thousands of simple folk and of which the end is not yet. It was her idea of God, and of God's will, that impelled the fair maid of Domrémy to a work and a warfare which restored the soul of France and changed the history of Europe. And she died at the age of eighteen. Both Francis and Joan of Arc were gripped, and caused others to be gripped, by a dynamic idea. Professor Lecky has told us that the preaching of John Wesley had a more profound and far-reaching effect on the English people than all the victories of Nelson and of Wellington. To come nearer still to our own day, the Christian idea of God has so

affected that famous district of Central Africa—the people of Uganda—that within half a century they have been transformed from a savage tribe to an intelligent and progressive nation, with a Civil Service, an educational system, a medical equipment, a Church organization, which would be a credit to any of the longer established Christian countries. On the hill where within living memory heathen rites were celebrated, there now stands a magnificent cathedral; here again the building is the outward sign of the mental and spiritual change which has come over the land.

There is, in fact, no question that in the long run there is nothing more powerful in the life of a nation or of a man than the idea of God. To miss that idea is to miss the meaning of life; on the other hand, the quest of that idea, like the quest of the Holy Grail, deserves all the energies of mind and soul that we can bring to it.

It cannot be pretended that this quest is popular. It is not somehow congenial to the modern mind. The modern mind is one of those things which are easier to talk about than to define. Like the latest fashion in ties or in hats, we cannot

be without it. But there is a good deal in our make-up which is far from modern. There are passions which have come down to us from a long line of animal ancestry, and we are well aware that unless we take firm control of the human car they will seize the wheel. The real problems of life, the control we do or do not exercise, the course we steer, the contacts we make with other people, the destination we have in view—there is nothing peculiarly modern in these, and these are the things which shape our destiny. The stage is as old as the human race; the play is always the same—the Fight for Character; the motives of the actors, good and bad, go on from generation to generation; only the scenery changes as the years go by.

But there is that in the modern scene which to many people makes the idea of God unattractive and unwelcome. In some minds, for example, there is a notion that science has not only explained religion, but explained it away. The comparative study of the different religions of the human race, it is vaguely supposed, has shown that they have certain ideas in common—as for example, the idea

of God's coming down to earth in human form—whether as the "heroes" of Greece or the incarnations of Hinduism—and therefore that religion, so far from being due to any divine impulse, is the product of the untutored thoughts of men who knew no better. What it does show is that in East and West men were searching for God and that it was natural for them to suppose that He might manifest Himself in the form of man. Again, the amazing progress of physical science in the last seventy years has made it certain that the universe is "run" according to a fixed plan—"the laws of nature" as it is called—and that this somehow removes God from the scene altogether. I should have thought, however, that the more orderly nature is seen to be, the more it suggests that there is a Mind and a Will at the back of it. But, whatever the explanation of these "laws," the result of all this scientific progress has been that more and more man has been able to control nature and, by discovering and then obeying its laws, to use its forces for his own advantage. Niagara is so manipulated that its mighty torrent is made to drive the trams and to light the streets and

to provide the factory-power for a dozen towns within its reach. Even the ether, an element unknown to our fathers, has been made into a veritable Ariel, bringing the news to the lonely moorland cottage, wafting the concert to the hospital ward, laughing at walls and doors, defying distance, and bringing millions at the same moment within sound of a single voice. With man thus laying bare the powers of nature and compelling them, like Prospero, to do his behests, it might well seem that God is superfluous. Where does He come in? But there are things more practical than even this that seem to keep Him out. If society is at one end too comfortable to feel any need of Him, at the other end it is too poverty-stricken to attend to Him.

When a man's or a woman's entire stock of energy is used up in the endeavour to make both ends meet, there is not much left for the higher things of life. The drudgery of the valley is so incessant that there is neither time nor energy to ascend the heights. At the other end in a life where every want real or imaginable is provided for, well-spread tables, cars at the

door, clothes in abundance, servants in attendance, God seems equally superfluous. Life is so softly cushioned, so pleasantly comfortable, that there is little or no scope for those virtues of discipline and self-denial, of service and sacrifice, which in Christ's mind were so intimately connected with God. When you have "got everything you want," where does God come in? But the difficulty is more practical still. It is, after all, not a very large proportion of the human race, or of the English race, which is too comfortable. What worries people much more are the inequalities of life; some people, as it seems, for no merit of their own born to a life of ease and success; others, owing to ill-health or ill-luck, scrambling along in the rough and never able to gain a really sure foothold in life. Since the world began men have puzzled their heads over this apparently insoluble riddle. To put it simply: Why do good people so often fail and bad people so often succeed? In dealing out fortune and misfortune to men and women there seems no system, no reason, no morality. Does the idea of God fit in with this? So men have asked, and will continue to ask.

It is sad to have to admit that one of the reasons why men are shy of God is the way in which He has sometimes been represented by His would-be champions. There are people still, I believe, who suppose that to believe in God is to be committed to the notion that the universe was created in six days, that a literal hell-fire awaits the wicked, and that the heathen who have never heard of God are doomed to endless punishment.

For these fantastic notions the Church has been greatly to blame. It is unfortunate that though the Bible is an Eastern book, almost all its interpreters have come from the West—and in the West we are too prosaic. We have insisted on regarding the first chapter of Genesis as a manual of science instead of an inspired poem. For just as "poetry is truer than history" so also it is truer than science. It reaches further and goes deeper. We have insisted on taking literally the vivid pictures of Eastern imagery. We have tried to turn the prophets into programme-makers. We have even taken the terse and comprehensive sayings of our Lord and tried to construe them as if they were clauses in an

Act of Parliament. On the other hand, when these notions were upset, when it transpired that the Bible was not intended to be an infallible manual of science or an infallible text-book of history, many persons thoughtlessly rushed to the conclusion that its truth was discredited and its authority gone. They did not stop to think. Consider, for instance, such facts as these. If the Bible had been an infallible text-book of science or of history, it would have foreclosed much of the invaluable investigation on both subjects which men, using their God-given brains, have carried out. It is not God's way to save men the trouble of thought. In the Bible He unveils truths which men could never have found out for themselves. On that first page of Genesis it is made plain in verses of surpassing dignity and beauty that behind the wonderful process was a Mind and Will and Purpose of Goodness; that the climax of the creation was and is Man; and that man was destined for fellowship with God. It was vital that man should know this. It was certain that he would never find it out for himself. The scientific details of the process men could in due time discover for themselves.

This they did, and still are doing, for in the nineteenth century more light was thrown upon the whole matter than in all the centuries preceding put together.

Further, it is God's way to use men as men and not as machines. Until recent years the inspiration of the Bible was thought to mean that the writers were hardly more than typewriters manipulated by the Spirit at whose bidding they wrote. We realize now that such a notion is honouring neither to God nor man. The fact that four of the books tell the story of the greatest life in history is itself a guarantee of "inspiration." That the writers' insight into spiritual things was enhanced—in some instances, like St. John and St. Paul, immensely enhanced—is obvious ; but what is so remarkable in the Bible is that though the writers lived in such different times (the whole period which they cover is about a thousand years) and circumstances they conspire to present an idea of God which is progressively more true, a worship which is progressively more spiritual, a morality which is progressively more adequate, until the moment when, in the coming and teaching of Christ, the

truth about God, about worship, and about morality, blazed forth in final splendour.

To suppose that the light thrown upon the Bible and its composition by modern scholarship has discredited it as the Word of God is the opposite of the truth. Henry Drummond, who had as large an experience of young men and their difficulties as anyone in the nineteenth century, used to say that for every one man whose faith was upset by the new ideas, ten were upset by the old. Indeed, it is obvious that a point of view which regards the Old Testament as a gradual preparation for the New must solve more problems than it raises. It is, for instance, a relief to realize that the earlier notions—as, for instance, that animal sacrifices were in themselves pleasing to God, that He could authorize the wholesale extermination of a clan, or that He attaches a vital importance to details of ceremonial—were only the first halting steps in the process by which the Israelites came to understand more fully what God is like and what God wants done. They "saw through a glass darkly," yet even before Christ came they learnt to know better; for in the Old Testament itself—especially in its

latter parts—such conceptions are completely contradicted, and an idea of God is put forth which makes them literally and completely "out of date." Nor is this all. In the light of recent scholarship the prophets have come to life again. Instead of being isolated from the times in which they lived, and regarded as almost magical predicters of future events, their portraits have been put back into their own proper frames and they are seen to be ardent social reformers who, like Carlyle and Ruskin, scourge the social evils of their day in scathing language, but who, unlike some of their modern counterparts, relate all their "present-day" problems to God, God's character, God's dealings with men. Indeed, a few pages of an Old Testament prophet are often more illuminating for the problems of even the twentieth century than whole volumes of contemporary theorizing. For the prophets go straight to the root of the difficulty, which is ultimately what man thinks of God and what God thinks of man.

If on the one hand the Bible is supposed to be discredited, on the other hand the Church is thought to be more so. There is more substance

in this allegation, for the deficiencies of the Church are neither few nor small. In fact, the higher his ideal of the Church the more a man is dissatisfied with the reality. Why did not the Church stop the War? Why does not the Church ensure universal peace? Why does not the Church abolish slums? Questions like these, even if they are not very thoughtful, indicate a healthy refusal to regard the Church as anything less than the divinely appointed instrument for carrying out Christ's known will. It is only too common knowledge that she is half-paralysed partly by her "unhappy divisions," and partly by the fact that she has to carry so many people as inert passengers who ought to be working as members of the crew.

For what is the Church? Not the clergy, but the whole comradeship of Christ—men, women and children—all of whom have been pledged to live according to His principles and to work for the accomplishment of His plan. It is often the nominal member of the Society who thus criticizes it, whereas, if the old-time prophet were here, he would exclaim, "Thou art the man!" What are *you* doing,

—you baptized member of Christ's brotherhood —to abolish war, to eliminate slums, to create industrial fellowship, to see to it that in politics, whether of the nation or the town, as in private life, honour and honesty shall prevail? What are *you* doing to spread that Kingdom among the nations by which alone the passions which are the parents of war can be curbed and transformed? Moreover, we are so accustomed to the Christian environment in which we live that we no more remember our debt to the Church than the child in his comfortable home thinks of his debt to his parents, or the worshipper in the beautiful church thinks of his debt to the architect.

Even in that most flagrant outburst of un-Christianity which our generation has seen—the Great War—we sometimes forget not merely the superb display of devotion to duty and of selfless heroism, but the way in which the wounds and the suffering were instantly pursued and counteracted by all the sleepless activities of healing and comfort, for body and soul, which Christian nations could organize. The red cross was never absent, and as fast as the war seemed to undo Christianity, so fast it seemed to unveil

the stark realities of God and life, love and death, which are in the very heart of the Church's message.

I have passed in review some of the reasons which seem to make the idea of God unpalatable to our own generation. But when all is said the fact remains that—if I may put it crudely—God is in demand. The debates on the Revised Prayer Book, to say nothing of recent "stunts" in the Press, have exposed a real longing on the part of many persons to know what there is to be known about God. "We are waiting for the man who shall come with his lips touched with the live flame from the altar of God."[1] That knowledge is available, and, like many others, I would try humbly to do my part in giving it.

[1] Sir Martin Conway in the House of Commons, December 15, 1927.

SIGNPOSTS

Chapter II

"So little pains will most men take in search for truth, so much more readily they turn to what comes first."

THUCYDIDES.

SIGNPOSTS do not get you to your destination, but they show the way. There is a story of an Indian fakir who, seated at the roadside, saw an Englishman approaching. "Sir," said he, "can you tell me the way to God?" In that query is summed up the fundamental interest of East and West. Of the intensity of that search there are signs on every hand. I think I can tell my reader the answer to the fakir's question, for it can be expressed in one word—Christ: but I want first to call your attention to certain signposts which, even apart from this, point to the right road.

To begin with, it is significant that from the very first mankind has tried to find this road. Go to Egypt and examine the centuries-old tombs and temples; read the most ancient literature

of Greece ; ask yourself what is the meaning of Stonehenge and of the barrows (some of which have been excavated) in Wiltshire and elsewhere ; walk into the British Museum and look at the relics of Assyria and Babylon ; make inquiries into the ways of prehistoric man and his burial customs. The net result will be a conviction that whatever else man has been concerned about through his long history, he has been concerned about God. To find God, to know God—that, next to keeping himself alive, was his supreme interest,

Now if this craze for God (if I may so put it) is universal, it is at least likely that it was meant to be satisfied. The psychologists tell us—indeed we know it—that there are certain primitive instincts in every man, "urges" they call them. One is the "urge" to keep himself alive, another is the "urge" to propagate his species, another is the "urge" to assert himself, to secure for himself "a place in the sun." He finds himself in a world in which, normally, all these "urges" can be satisfied in one form or another. But there is still another "urge," the "urge" of his higher self, the "urge" to know God. Is this to be the great

exception to the rule? Are the other "urges" to be met, but not this one? Is this, the deepest "urge" of all, to waste itself on the desert air in efforts that are bound to be barren? On the contrary, the very fact that this "urge" is so widespread and reaches so far beyond the immediate concerns of the body may well be an indication that it can be satisfied. This satisfaction is largely lacking, partly for the reasons which I have already indicated, partly because we have been hypnotized by material things. I suppose the level of comfort has risen so fast in the last fifty years that we have been swept off our feet spiritually. We have mistaken "civilization" for life. But just as in philosophy thinkers are beginning to shake themselves free from the tyranny of materialism, so it must be in more practical matters, though the process will be much longer. For many of the younger generation at least show signs of realizing that "man cannot live by bread alone." They are demanding Reality; in other words, they want to know the way to God.

But to come back to the signposts. There are three of them. I will call them Science, Art,

and Myself. They cannot really be sharply distinguished in that way, but it will help us to do so. First, then, Science. And here I am thinking of what is commonly called Natural Science, that is, the observance of the ways of the universe so far as they can be watched and tabulated. I hope we are getting away from the notion that science and religion are necessarily opposed, for if there is a Creator of the Universe it is obvious that the road which leads to Him through science cannot be antagonistic to the road which leads to Him through religion, even though this latter road is the more direct. You can motor from Winchester to London by the main road through Farnham and Guildford, or by the main road through Basingstoke and Bagshot, but the roads do not quarrel on that account. They supplement each other. Yet even at this time of day this old antagonism is still assumed, and by people who should know better. I read, for instance, such words as these : " That (i.e. the longing for a new spiritual leader) we feel is the deep-seated hope of the majority of educated men and women. They cannot lead the double life, accepting evolution and

scientific truth six days of the week, and solemnly disbelieving in them on the seventh."[1] I take leave to say that this is absurd. Who wants anyone to lead this "double life"? Why should it be assumed that the religion of the Sunday is opposed to the science of the weekdays? The fact is that many people assume that the teaching given in church is precisely what it was, say fifty years ago, without taking the trouble to see and hear for themselves. It is true that there was a famous "scene" between Bishop Wilberforce and Professor Huxley at the Oxford meeting of the British Association, but a deal of water has flowed under the intellectual bridge since then, and only lately we have been reminded on very good authority that the acceptance of evolution as entirely congenial to the Christian faith is an old story.[2]

In what way, then, does modern science suggest God?. Well, for one thing, it emphasizes the *orderliness* of the universe of which our little planet is a member. The movements of the

[1] *Country Life*, December 24, 1927.

[2] See the letter of the Archbishop of Canterbury to the Bishop of Birmingham, October, 1927.

stars can be predicted in the astronomical almanacs with far greater certainty than the movements of trains can be predicted in Bradshaw. Further, it is evident that the universe is "run" on a basis of cause and effect which never fails. Night always follows day. The apple blown off the tree always falls down and not up. Indeed, so flawless is the order that men have argued that it must be merely mechanical. The universe, they have thought, is just a big machine which goes by itself. In this way they have thought to throw overboard all ideas of a Creator-God, or of a directing Mind, or of even a Vital Force behind the processes of nature. The blessed word "mechanism," they have imagined, will dispose of the lot.

But will it? If the universe works automatically, it is odd that it should be able to produce people like you and me who can discuss whether it *does* work automatically and who know therefore that "mind" and "purpose" do not really exist! But there is more in the difficulty than that. Machines do not "run" themselves. There is not a machine on earth which was not invented by someone's brains and worked by someone's skill. In other words, a

machine presupposes a man. I was in a factory the other day and I saw a marvellous machine for producing the paper of which £5 notes are made. It was working by itself. It is the result of a long evolution of machines, each better than the last, until this almost perfect instrument has been reached. A visitor from Mars, knowing nothing of the facts, and seeing it revolving with no one standing by, might say, Here is energy working by itself. It needs no attention. It just goes. But on further inquiry he would be told that behind that machine are (1) the brains of the inventor, (2) the skill of the men who keep it in order, (3) the purpose of the proprietor who produces the paper, and (4) the orders of the Government for whom the paper is made. In other words, that machine so far from being merely mechanical is instinct with mind, purpose, life—in fact, with all those things which "mechanism" is supposed to get rid of.

But what of the infinitely greater "machine" of the universe in which we live? Is it so "mechanical" that it goes by itself, or does it, like the £5-note machine, involve a mind and a purpose? We may safely leave com-

mon sense to give the answer. But this wonderful orderliness of our universe has another side to it. It is trustworthy. The very fact that nature works so regularly that we can speak of the "laws of nature" is precisely what gives us our power and our freedom. Unless we could reckon on this trustworthiness of nature, life would be unbearable. "If fire sometimes heated, sometimes froze, the kettle, who could invite a friend to tea? If the laws of specific gravity changed from day to day, who would venture in balloon or ship? Science is always discovering some new law; but this, so far from being the discovery of a fresh limit to man's liberty, puts new power into his hands."[1] And the same is true in the sphere of morals. Every good action clears the way for more good. Every evil action brings its consequences. The moral law works as regularly, though not always so obviously, as the law of gravitation. In other words, the world is not a chaos. It has principles. It is orderly. In such a universe man feels at home. It is akin to his own ideas of order. And the more he conforms to this order,

[1] B. H. Streeter. *Reality*, p. 225.

physically and morally, discovers its laws, *and obeys them,* the more powerful he feels himself to be.

If the first suggestion of science is Order, the second is Progress. According to the orthodox notions of a century ago, the world was brought into being "ready made" or at least within a very easily measurable space of time. Now we think differently. We believe that the world of life in its almost infinite variety has been evolved—rolled out, as you unroll a carpet which at first covers a few inches of the room and finally covers the whole floor. Only this picture is of course entirely inadequate. For one thing, the "roll" begins with the lowest form of life, and after processes of selection and rejection stretching over millenniums of years arrives at the human production with which we are all familiar. But the possibilities were all wrapped up in the earliest bits of life just as the oak is wrapped up in the acorn or just as the King George engine of the Great Western Railway was wrapped up in Stephenson's "Puffing Billy." The process of this unrolling is the romance of the universe. It seems that at each succeeding

level of life certain individuals were more than usually adaptable and could respond more fully to their surroundings. These A1 specimens stepped up, whereas the C3 specimens stayed where they were and died. But a new vantage-ground had been won, and then the same process was repeated. Certain creatures heard the call of a higher world and began to develop new powers to correspond. Creatures that had been accustomed to the water discovered that water was not the only world they had to cope with. There was a world of air. Promptly the more adaptable of them began to contrive instruments —we call them wings—by which they could propel themselves in this new world, and sought to adapt the other organs of their bodies accordingly. And so the process went on. Certain animals more gifted than the others responded to the call to a higher world, and for the unresponsive creatures it was a case of "as you were." Thus, at last, in response to a summons more lofty still, certain creatures began to develop, not merely new powers of body, but powers of a different order, powers of mind. They thought, they reasoned, they planned. But they went

higher still. For they perceived that beyond this wonderful world there was a world even more wonderful, a world to which the measurements of time and space do not apply, a spiritual world, and to this new surrounding they must somehow respond. Respond they did. And, lo and behold! the climax of the whole process, the final august figure in the long procession—Man!

And even now the procession has not paused. God has not stopped creating. Nothing is more certain in your experience and in mine than that we belong to both worlds—the material world and the spiritual world—and the discipline of life consists in the struggle which is thereby involved. Man has not reached his destination: he is only on the way.

> "... progress, Man's distinctive mark alone,
> Not God's, and not the beasts': God is, they are,
> Man partly is and wholly hopes to be."

And the journey is difficult: so difficult indeed that the Creator Himself condescended to come into the process in person and to lend that helping hand without which the procession would have come to a final halt. Unaided man could get no further. In the material comforts of

"civilization" he could indeed go a long way, but there was and is—apart from God's intervention—no guarantee that he will not use his marvellous control of nature for his own destruction. Science can construct bombs as well as discover cures. But I am anticipating. My point just now is that the new view of creation disclosed by science is far more suggestive of a Creator than the old one. Suddenly to bring into being a reach-me-down world is more suggestive of the conjurer's methods than of those gradual silent workings of which every tree and every flower is a standing witness. And the very last thing that can be said of evolution is that it is "mechanical." Where did the acorn purchase the power of becoming an oak? Who engineered the amazing process by which you have an amœba—a bit of jelly—at one end and a man at the other end, with all the struggles and jolts and motions and leaps that intervened? The spectacle of a stage-coach going in at one end of the tunnel and of a fully equipped express train coming out at the other, the one having developed into the other meanwhile, would be simple and commonplace compared with the

intricate working and the invisible power of the progress which has resulted in you and me. What is there behind it? Who designed it? Who guided its course? Who gave it the first push? Again I say the conclusion is not far to seek.

Signpost number one.

The next signpost—Art—is of a different order. It deals with things which cannot be classified and catalogued. It is more concerned with quality than with quantity, with the kind of difference which there is between a photograph and a painting. A photograph aims at reproducing the exact form and features of the sitter. A painting attempts an interpretation through the outward and the visible of the man's character and outlook. Art in fact confesses that the outward and the visible, and the audible too, is the expression of something deeper, something inward and spiritual. And, unless it is freakish and degenerate, it aims at beauty; not charm or prettiness or even attraction, but beauty in its nobler sense. And it does so because it finds itself in a world of beauty.

"There are curiously few general affirmations that we can make about Nature," says a well-known scientist [1]; "one is that Nature is in great part intelligible . . . and another is that Nature is in greater part beautiful. If the popular impression be that beauty is the exception, the scientific impression is that beauty is the rule. This is as true of . . . the lines of the crane as of the cedars of Lebanon. It is as true of the carefully-hidden down feathers of the eagle as of the tail of the peacock. It is as true of the internal architecture of the sea-urchin's spine as of the external moulding of the tiger. It is as true of the minute chiselling of many a moth's egg-shell as of the sweeping lines of an Iguanodon." The extraordinary fact is that the world is full of superfluous beauty. Superfluous, because there was no absolute *need* for it so far as life, and even human life, is concerned. The shining peaks of an Alpine range, the soft glory of a moonlit sea, the rich splendour of a flower-garden in high summer, the sunset sky lit up with every gradation of gold and pink to

[1] J. A. Thomson in *The System of Animate Nature*, vol. I, chap. viii.

the delicate greens and purples of the horizon —these are not necessities of life, they are displays of glory gratuitously provided for our enjoyment. There is that in all of us which responds. We feel almost instinctively that it is the signal of some quality which is greater than anything we can see; that somehow there must be beauty in the very nature of things; that whatever is behind the processes of creation must itself be beautiful.

And this impression is confirmed when we observe the fact that the men who have done most for the human race have been pre-eminently the creators or the restorers of the beautiful. William Shakespeare reflecting, with his matchless skill, the heights and depths of human life; Bach and Beethoven, striving to express, in immortal music, their perception of that which words could never utter; the great painters and the great architects all on the same great quest; not least the reformers, men like William Booth or Charles Kingsley, seeking to redeem the world from ugliness and restore the intended beauty in human life and in human souls.

Let the roll-call of artists, poets, *creators*, line

up and tell us the secret of their work. They never could. They could only say that they saw the vision, the vision of beauty, and tried to help others to see it, too. But whence comes that vision? Why this instinct for the beautiful? Who kindled this hatred of what is ugly, this craving for what is lovely? Is there at the back of it something or some one who is supremely beautiful?

Signpost number two.

The third signpost is the clearest of the three. It is yourself. Look at home. What are you, anyway? A bubble on the stream of life? A passing vessel which leaves no track? Or do you feel that you have cravings and capacities for which your little circle of existence gives inadequate scope? that you are more than the sum total of the life-cells of which your body is built up? Of course you do! You may live in a London suburb or work in a dingy office, but in your power of imagination these barriers fall flat and you can "roam through worlds unknown." More than that, you have a power of choice, a will, an ambition, worthy or not,

which makes you feel that you are not the slave of circumstances, but the master of your own destiny. More even than this, you have a capacity for emotion, for love and sympathy, which can only find its satisfaction in fellowship. And when you add the amazing "mechanism" of the body with its perfectly adapted organs, you—if you were to stop and think—must feel amazed at this specimen of nature's handiwork, and indeed forced to the conclusion that man is *at present* the "last word" in creative skill. He is in process of "becoming," but he is the topmost step in the colossal staircase of evolution. Just as in an ecclesiastical procession the most important figure comes last, so it is with man. We can neither know nor imagine anything nobler.

It is true that he has his weakness. He is "sore let and hindered." But it is admitted to be a weakness. Sin and wrong are not characteristic of man proper. In Mr. Chesterton's picture, you don't say to a crocodile, when he has just devoured his tenth explorer: Now come, have done with that; be a crocodile. For "'tis his nature to." But to a man who has given way to his

temptation you do say: Be a man—for it does not belong to man, in his true self, to be weak. There are those, of course, who maintain that what with heredity and what with environment a man's power of choice is an illusion. I may be pardoned for quoting the well-known lines :—

> "There was a young man who said ——!"[1]
> I wish I could tell what I am;
> A creature that moves
> In determinate grooves,
> Not exactly a bus but a tram?"

Or, to quote a more respectable poem :—

> "Faugh! There is no man free in all this world!
> Slaves of possessions, slaves of fortune, hurled
> This way and that. Or else the multitude
> Hath hold on him; or laws of stone and wood
> Constrain, and will not let him use the soul
> Within him."[2]

That contention is not admitted in a police court. Nor will it hold water for a moment in the ordinary affairs of life. The responsibility for what you say or do is yours and it cannot be palmed off on to your ancestors or your environment. It is a burden, but it is far more;

[1] The reader will supply the missing word by "conjectural emendation."

[2] The Hecuba of Euripides. Lines translated by Gilbert Murray in *Essays and Addresses*, p. 74.

it is the badge of manhood, the hall-mark of the highest form of life that the world has seen. And apparently there are signs of it much lower down the scale than is commonly supposed. "An unexpected streak of spontaneity has appeared in the atom itself." [1]

Being what we are, we cannot help thinking and speaking in terms of personality. We "personify" almost at random. It may be the express engine which her driver always speaks of as "she" and which is named the "Princess of Wales." It may be the car you drive—"She goes well to-day," you say—or the liner in which you sail. If so, it is not surprising that man has always personified God. Some one has said that if a triangle could think it would think of its God as triangular. If we think of God at all we think of Him as a person. A non-personal God has no meaning and no attraction. But if personality—yours and mine—is at once so familiar and so mysterious, if it is the highest thing we know, then it looks as if there must be a supreme Person. And we notice that in

[1] The Bishop of Birmingham: *Should such a Faith Offend?* p. 290.

ordinary life the more a person acts on the highest principles, the more unselfish he is, the more powerful his personality becomes, the more he is (as we say) his real self. Therefore it is reasonable to suppose that if there is a super-person from whom all persons derive he must be superlatively good, wise, true, in fact, the quintessence of all those qualities by which we find that personality is enhanced. It may, of course, seem extraordinary that, if there be such a super-person, the creator of the universe, he can possibly be concerned with the persons on a little planet like ours—a planet which, compared to the other suns and stars, is merely a speck of dust on the floor.

But you must remember that personality is not to be measured and weighed like the rocks or the stars. It has *quality*. You can no more measure it than you can measure the heroism of a Captain Oates or the devotion of a Florence Nightingale. The two things are in different categories. The value of things is not determined by size or distance. For if there is a super-personality, then the stuff of which persons are made must be of infinite value as being akin to his own

"make-up." Any person, therefore, may carry a value compared to which suns and stars are as dust in the balance. In any case we look at home. Science tells us that the supreme product of the whole system is persons. Art tells us that there are things in the universe which are outside the range of "Scientific" measurements. They have quality rather than quantity. An artist may be six feet high, but his worth does not consist in that. If the highest product of evolution is Man, who produced him? If the most precious thing in the world is personality, and if the personality rises in the scale of value according to goodness, and goodness is the highest quality of personality, then (one would think) there must be a Supreme Person who is also Supreme Goodness.

Which is the third signpost.

HOW MEN BEGAN TO KNOW GOD

Chapter III

"Many were the forms and fashions in which God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets. . . ."

HEBREWS i. 1.

So much for the signposts. But they do not answer the vital question: What is God like? Men have asked this question since the world began, and the history of religion is the history of men's attempt to find an answer. That answer has taken many forms, some of them very crude, such as the hideous idol I remember seeing in a Chinese joss-house at Mandalay, or the sleek and smiling figure of the god of pleasure which you will find in the street of an Indian city, or the ghastly image of the goddess Kali with her protruding tongue and her appetite for blood. Other representations are more refined, but there is no cause for us people of the West to assume airs of superiority, for if the behaviour of men and women is any indication of the gods they worship, then it is evident that the golden calf

still has his devotees and that the god of pleasure is anything but out of date.

In the last chapter I asked your attention to some signposts which show the way to an answer to this question—Science, Art, and Personality. But the answer they suggest is not sufficient. It certainly looks as if there must be a Mind, a Purpose, a Will behind the world we live in and the life with which we are familiar. But we do not know for certain. The signposts, as I said, point in the right direction, but they do not get us to our destination. Yet it is vital to find a more definite answer, if it is possible, for on their answer (conscious or unconscious) to the question depends in the long run men's whole attitude and outlook on life.

It is obvious that any answer which is really authentic and reliable must come in the last resort from God Himself. It is no use talking in an airy fashion of the Divine Energy, or the Absolute, or even the Power that makes for righteousness. These philosophical expressions are no doubt useful from a purely intellectual standpoint. But for the ordinary man they cut no ice. He wants a picture of God which is

recognizable and which he can understand. Nothing, for instance, could be more pathetic than Plato's longing for some "divine word" which should give trustworthy information about God and life and immortality. Socrates is discussing with a friend, Simmias, the great question of the immortality of the soul. "It seems to me, Socrates," says Simmias, "that it is very difficult, if not impossible, in this present life to have clear knowledge concerning such subjects; but that, on the other hand, it is the mark of a faint-hearted spirit to desist from examining all that is said about them . . . or to abandon the search so long as there is any chance of light anywhere. For on such subjects one ought to secure one of two things, either to learn or discover the truth, or, if this is impossible, to get the best of human argument and the hardest to refute, and relying on this as on a raft, to sail the perilous sea of life; *unless one were able, more securely and less perilously, to make one's journey upon a safer vessel—upon some divine word.*" [1]

Everything, then, depends on whether God has made any advance "on His own." Has He

[1] See Bishop Gore's *Belief in God*, p. 68.

taken any steps to make Himself known? Has He communicated any divine word? The answer is in the affirmative. In the first place, He was using these very questionings of men to open their minds to more worthy thoughts of Himself. Long before Christ's day there was "the Light coming into the world," [1] and wherever adaptable lanterns could be found it lit them up. By which I mean that the great thinkers, artists, moralists of those far-off days all caught something, and reflected something, of that Light.

If the great sculptors Pheidias and Praxiteles reflected something of its beauty, there were others who reflected something of its moral grandeur; men like the great Emperor Asoka, who, more than two centuries before Christ, preached to his Indian subjects on duty, on family affection, on justice, on charity, in a way which a moralist might well envy.[2] Or like the

[1] St. John i. 9.

[2] Here are some of his maxims inscribed on pillars, some of which are still standing in various parts of India.

"Thus saith His Majesty:

"Father and mother must be obeyed; similarly respect for living creatures must be enforced; truth must be spoken. These are the virtues of the Law of Duty [or "Piety"] which must be practised. Similarly, the teacher must be reverenced by the pupil, and proper courtesy must be shown to relations."

"A man must not do reverence to his own sect or disparage

Chinese sage Confucius, who laid the foundation of that reverence for family life (extending to ancestor-worship) which has long been characteristic of that great nation. Or like the young man, afterwards revered as the Buddha, who, though his idea of God was null and negative, led the way along the narrow path of self-denial and service—a path along which millions in all parts of the East have followed him since. In the sacred poems of India, too, the Vedas, as also in teachings of the Persian Zoroaster, there are "broken lights" of God, as the writers pondered the mysteries of life and death and the Hereafter.

All this is suggestive of God, but it is not definite enough, not sufficient; we must have a "Word of the Lord" or else abandon the quest. And there is such a "Word." Unless Christianity is a fraud and a delusion—and to believe this involves you in far greater difficulties than any from which it might be supposed to release you—God did actually make advances to an insignificant

that of another man without reason . . . because the sects of other people all deserve reverence for one reason or another."

"But wherein consists the Law of Duty? In these things, to wit . . . many good deeds, compassion, liberality, truthfulness, and purity."

clan, living in a country about the size of Wales, a clan which became, and for seven long centuries continued to be, the world's specialists in religion. Some people think the Old Testament is dull. So it is if you read it unintelligently. But so long as parents are interested in watching the development of their children in character and capacity, so long will it be thrilling to watch the way in which the Supreme Father taught a little people—often most tiresome and intractable—something of the truth about Himself, and how they, or at least their best men, responded. Two things are interesting about children : the way they take things in, and the way they give things out—their expression-work as we call it. So it was with the Israelites. At first they were a long time taking things in. We find them surrounded with all the paraphernalia of paganism—sacred pillars, consecrated trees, crude idols, methods of magic for divining the future. Their idea of holiness is in early days a matter of physical contacts—they must not touch a dead body, they must not go too near the sanctuary, they must be careful how they handle their sacred ark. It is only gradually that they perceive that holi-

ness is more concerned with things moral than things ceremonial. Similarly, they imagine at first that Jehovah is the God of their own particular tribe and that His domain is confined to their own land. If any worshipper of His desires to do his devotions in a foreign land, he must provide himself with some Israelite soil on which to do them.[1]

Yet little by little their education proceeded, and they began to express something of what they had learned. This "expression-work" was most remarkable in the case of a succession of men, commonly called the "prophets," who claimed to be authorities on the subject of God in a way which is without parallel in ancient times. "Thus saith the Lord" was the solemn formula by which most of their teaching was introduced. It was a tremendous claim. Has it been substantiated? Well, no sane man who wanted to study the subject of God would leave them out. Nor can it be said that modern thought, with its doubts and its hesitations and its provisional conclusions, has improved on them. Indeed, the average level of our present-day thought is far

[1] 2 Kings v. 17.

below them. What have they to say in answer to our question ? Can they tell us what God is like ? what God thinks of man ? what God wants from man ? Take those three points and let them speak for themselves.

What God is like. Not like an idol, to begin with. Was anything ever written about idols more scathing than this ?

" Makers of idols are all inane, and their adored images are futile ; an idol's devotees are blind and dull, their end is shame.

Who would carve a god or cast an idol ?—mere futilities !

The spells put on it make a sorry show, and its magic charms are only man-made ; let its adherents gather, let them come forward, and they shall quake, they shall at once be disconcerted.

The blacksmith works with the coals and hammers the idol into shape, plying his brawny arms, losing strength as he grows hungry and weary for a drink of water.

The worker in wood draws lines on the block, marking them with a pencil ; then he shapes the idol with his plane into a human figure, comely as a man, to occupy a shrine.

In cutting timber for this purpose a man will fix upon some plane or oak, which God planted and the rain nourished to serve as fuel ;

men kindle a fire with it to warm themselves, they start a blaze in order to bake bread. But he turns it into a god for worship ; he makes it into an idol and bows down to it !

Half of it he burns in the fire, roasting flesh upon the embers ; he eats the roast meat and he is satisfied, warming himself and saying, ' Ha, I am warm now, I feel the glow ! '

The other half he turns into a god, into an idol, and bows down to it, worshipping it, praying to it, crying, 'Save me, for you are my god!'" [1]

On the other hand, was anything ever written about God more uplifting than this, from the same writer:

"Can you not understand, cannot you see?
Have you not been told this from the first,
have you not grasped this, since the world began
that he sits over the round earth, so high
that its inhabitants look like grasshoppers;
He spreads the skies out like a curtain,
and stretches them like a tent;
he brings nobles down to nothing,
he ruins rulers of the world,
scarcely planted, scarcely sown,
scarcely rooted in the earth,
at a puff from him they wither,
the storm sweeps them off like straw.

"'To whom will you compare me, then,
and equal me?' asks the Majestic One.
Lift your eyes, look up;
who made these stars?
he who marshals them in order,
summoning each one by name.
For fear of him, so mighty and so strong,
not one fails to appear.

"Why do you complain, O Jacob,
why do you cry, O Israel,
'My fate the Eternal never notices,
my rights are unregarded by my God?'

[1] Isaiah xliv. 9–17 (Moffatt's trans.).

Come now! Do you not understand,
have you not heard,
that the Eternal is an everlasting God,
the maker of the world from end to end?
He never faints, never is weary,
his insight is unsearchable;
he puts power into the weary,
and adds new strength to the weak.
Young men may faint and weary,
the strong youths may give way,
but those who wait for the Eternal
renew their strength,
they put out wings like eagles,
they run and never weary,
they walk and never faint." [1]

In these passages all the futile inadequate notions of God have been left far behind. No longer is He thought of as a tribal god with his local shrine in Jerusalem. He is the King of the nations, the Master of the universe, the Disposer of the lives of men. So completely is He in control of history, and that in spite of men's delinquencies, that even a heathen monarch like Cyrus is represented as an instrument for carrying out His plans:

"who says of Cyrus, 'He is my friend,
he executes my purpose!'"

"Thus the Eternal, the true God,
hails Cyrus, whom he consecrates—

[1] Isaiah xl. 21–31 (Moffatt's trans.).

whose right hand I have grasped,
to terrify nations,
to open doors before him,
to keep gates from being closed." [1]

But there is a more intimate note than this, for one of these men does not hesitate to describe God's relationship to men—and in particular to Israel—as that of a husband to his wife, a lover to his beloved:

"On that day, the Eternal declares,
she shall call me, 'My husband,'
no more, 'My Baal';

I will betroth her to me for ever,
betroth her in a bond
of goodness and of justice,
in kindness and in love;
yea, loyally will I betroth her,
to let her understand the Eternal." [2]

From these quotations—and many more might be added—it is clear that in their thought of God these men rose to a height incomparably loftier, more comprehensive, more inspiring, than any other thinkers or writers in the ancient world.

And the same is true of their thought of man

[1] Isaiah xliv. 28–xlv. 1 (Moffatt's trans.).
[2] Hosea ii. 16, 19, 20 (Moffatt's trans.).

both as an individual and in his social relationships. Listen to these lines, sublime in their simplicity and their beauty:

"for, as I look up to the heavens thy fingers made,
the moon and stars that thou hast shaped,
I ask, 'And what is man, that thou should'st think of him?
What is a mortal man, that thou should'st heed him?'
Yet thou hast made him little less than divine,
thou hast crowned him with majesty and honour,
giving him sway o'er all thy hands have made,
with all things underneath his feet—
sheep and oxen, all of them,
yes and the wild beasts,
birds of the air and fish of the sea—
all that swims on the wet sea-paths!
O thou Eternal One, our Lord,
what majesty is thine o'er all the world!" [1]

As to man's social relationships, it is to a thinker of Old Testament times that we owe that "word" which can never be added to nor surpassed, and which was adopted and "filled in" (so to speak) by Christ Himself: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." As to the detailed duties of community life no reformer of modern times—not even a Carlyle or a Ruskin—ever spoke with more devastating directness than did the men of the eighth century before Christ. Here, for instance, is Amos on luxury:

[1] Psalm viii. 4–10 (Moffatt's trans.).

"Woe to the careless citizens,
so confident in high Samaria,
leaders of this most ancient race,
who are like gods in Israel!
. . . .
lolling on their ivory diwans,
sprawling on their couches,
dining off fresh lamb and fatted veal,
crooning to the music of the lute,
composing airs like David himself,
lapping wine by the bowlful,
and using for ointment the best of the oil—
with never a single thought
for the bleeding wounds of the nation." [1]

Or Isaiah on the housing question—a passage in which he denounces the big estates which crowd out the small householder and filch the land from the people of the soil:

"Woe to the men who add house to house,
who join one field to another,
till there is room for none but them
in all the land!
The Lord of hosts has sworn to me,
'Many a mansion is to lie forlorn,
splendid and spacious and—empty!'" [2]

On the other hand, on the subject of war and peace, it would be difficult to find, in the literature of the world, a passage more moving than this:

"In after days it shall be
that the Eternal's hill shall rise,

[1] Amos vi. 1, 4–6 (Moffatt's trans.).
[2] Isaiah v. 8, 9 (Moffatt's trans.).

towering over every hill,
and higher than the heights.

Nations shall stream to it,
and many a people shall exclaim,
'Come, let us go to the Eternal's hill,
to the house of Jacob's God,
that he may instruct us in his ways,
to walk upon his paths.'
For instruction comes from Sion,
and from Jerusalem the Eternal's word.

He will decide the disputes of many races,
and arbitrate between strong foreign powers,
till swords are beaten into ploughshares,
and spears into pruning-hooks;
no nation draws the sword against another,
no longer shall men learn to fight,
but live each underneath his vine

and underneath his fig-tree,
in terror of no one:
for so the lips of the Lord of hosts decree." [1]

Or the well-known description (read on Christmas Day) of the bonfire of war accoutrements and the coming of the Prince of Peace:

"For thou hast broken their heavy yoke,
the bar that bent their shoulders,
and the whip of their oppressors,
as at the triumph over Midian;
the stamping warrior's boot,
the bloodstained war-attire,
shall all of them be burnt,
as fuel for the fire.
For a child has been born to us,
a son has been given to us;

[1] Micah iv. 1–4 (Moffatt's trans.).

the royal dignity he wears,
and this the title that he bears—
'A wonder of a counsellor,
a divine hero,
a father for all time,
a peaceful prince!'" [1]

In the same way, in regard to worship and ceremonial, the outlook of the prophets is as appropriate to the twentieth century as it was to their own times. The searching words of Micah, for instance, as to the essentials of religion, can never be out of date. They reverberate down the centuries and might well be placarded over the door of every place of worship that man has built:

"Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old?

"Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

"He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" [2]

In similar strain is the scathing passage in which Isaiah denounces the churchpeople who forget the moral demands of religion in their meticulous attention to its ceremonial obligations:

[1] Isaiah ix. 4–6 (Moffatt's trans.).
[2] Micah vi. 6–8 (R.V.).

"Listen to the Eternal's word,
you 'Sodom' of authorities!
Listen to our God's orders,
you 'Gomorrah' of citizens!
'What care I for all your lavish sacrifices?'
the Eternal asks;
'I am sick of slaughtered rams,
of fat from fatted beasts;
the blood of bullocks and of goats
is no delight to me.
Who asked that from you,
when you gather in my presence?
Crowd my courts no more,
bring offerings no more;
the smoke of sacrifice is vain,
I loathe it;
your gatherings at the new moon and on sabbath,
I cannot abide them;
your fasts and festivals,
my soul abhors them,
they are a weariness to me,
I am tired of them.
You may stretch out your hands,
but I will never look at you,
and though you offer many a prayer,
I will not listen.
Your hands are full of bloodshed;
wash yourselves clean,
banish your evil doings
from my sight,
cease to do wrong,
learn to do right,
make justice all your aim,
and put a check on violence,
let orphans have their rights,
uphold the widow's cause.'" [1]

[1] Isaiah i. 10–17 (Moffatt's trans.).

These are but a few specimens out of scores of passages which might be collected, but they make it abundantly clear that long before Christ came there was a succession of men whose thought of God was (as we say) miles in advance of any contemporary teachers in their own or in any other nation. Their view of God and of morality, it has been truly said,[1] is as literally epoch-making in the history of religion as was the discovery of Copernicus in the realm of science.

How is it to be accounted for? You may say that they were men of genius in the spiritual life. But whence came that genius? Did it derive solely from their own cogitations, or did it flash upon them from outside? There is no manner of doubt what *they* thought about it. They never claimed to be original thinkers. They *did* claim to have heard the voice of God and to report what they had heard. The phrase they incessantly use is not, "I have been thinking this matter over, and this is my conclusion," but "Thus saith the Lord." And in view of the grandeur of their teaching we shall be foolish, if

[1] B. H. Streeter and others: *Adventure*, p. 162.

not impertinent, if we think ourselves more competent to judge of its source than they were. But again let them speak for themselves.

Amos:

"The lion hath roared, who will not fear?
the Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?" [1]

He owns that he was no specialist in religion, yet he is equally certain that he has received a message from God and that that message must be delivered:

"I am no prophet, no member of any prophets' guild; I am only a shepherd, and I tend sycomores.
But the Eternal took me from the flock; the Eternal said to me, 'Go and prophesy to my people Israel.'" [2]

Jeremiah:

"This word from the Eternal came to me:
'Before I formed you in the womb, I chose you; ere ever you were born, I set you apart; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.'
Then I said,
'Ah, but, O Lord Eternal, I cannot speak,
I am too young!'
But the Eternal said to me, 'Say not, you are too young; to whomsoever I send you shall you go, and whatever I command you, shall you speak.
Be not afraid at the sight of them, for I am with you to succour you.'
The Eternal said it. And then the Eternal put out his

[1] Amos iii. 8 (R.V.).
[2] Amos vii. 14, 15 (Moffatt's trans.).

hand to touch my mouth : the Eternal said to me, ' There I
I have put my words into your mouth ;
here and now I give you authority over nations and king-
doms, to tear up, to break down, to shatter, to pull down,
to build up and to plant.' " [1]

Here the claim to " inspiration " could hardly be more definite, and it is the more significant when we remember that in his case, as in the case of nearly all the prophets, the message he had to deliver was exceedingly unpopular. The success of the modern Press—in some instances at least—and of certain public men has been due to the possession of an uncanny instinct for knowing what the people want to hear or to read. They can, in a remarkable way, " respond to their environment." The very opposite of this was true of the Israelite thinkers and speakers. They responded to their environment indeed, but their environment—as they believed—was in the first instance not the populace, but God, God's will, God's plan, God's affair with His people. They were not concerned to voice the popular will, but to interpret God to all who would listen and think and act. Often enough this brought them into direct antagonism to the Government's policy in

[1] Jeremiah i. 4–10 (Moffatt's trans.).

foreign affairs [1] or to the established Church [2] or to the vested interests of the wealthy [3] or even the women's fashions of the moment.[4] Still more often it enabled them to voice new hopes of God's forgiveness [5] and of national restoration,[6] new assurances of God's care [7] and of God's love.[8]

Here is Isaiah's incomparable account of his call to be a spokesman of God:

"In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.

Above him stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.

And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.

And the foundations of the thresholds were moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.

Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

[1] See Isaiah xxx. 15–17; xxxi. 1–3; Jeremiah xxvi. 1–16.
[2] Amos vii. 10–13.
[3] Amos v. 17; Isaiah iii. 13–15.
[4] Isaiah iii. 16–24.
[5] Isaiah i. 18; Micah vii. 18, 19.
[6] Micah iv. 6, 7; Zechariah viii. 2–5; Haggai ii. 4–9.
[7] Isaiah liv. 7–10; xliii. 1–7.
[8] Hosea xiv. 1–7.

Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar:
and he touched my mouth with it, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.
And I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I said, Here am I; send me." [1]

Now if there be any truth in the representation of God's character and God's relationship to men indicated even in the few quotations printed above, it is reasonable to suppose that such a God would be likely to make still further advances to men. If He is really the kind of God that Isaiah and the other spokesmen describe Him, then inevitably He will wish still further to unveil Himself, still further to make plain His plans and hopes for men. And this is precisely what we find. As you read the words of these spiritual geniuses you cannot help noticing that though they are incessantly and intimately concerned with the *present*, they are continually throwing glances into the *future*. They seem to see the vision of a restored nation and a purified church-life, but they see something more. A

[1] Isaiah vi. 1–8 (R.V.).

Figure looms on the horizon of their thinking, sometimes vague, sometimes clear, but always there, as the crown and climax of their hopes and longings. At times he seems to be the nation personified; at times he is more definitely an individual. He is seen in many guises. He is the wonderful youth,[1] the perfect king,[2] the gentle shepherd,[3] the hero-prince of peace,[4] the suffering saviour,[5] the victorious warrior.[6]

Was this expectation the result of a vivid imagination? Was it a picturesque method of putting fresh hope into the heart of a nation worn out with the "changes and chances" of its chequered career? Or did it indicate a new and still more wonderful approach towards men on the part of God? It is evident that that was what the prophets expected. Has it in fact taken place? Looking back from a distance of many centuries we ought to be in a position to say Yes or No. The Christian answer is Yes. There has been an Act of God. He has unveiled Himself in the only way we could understand, by becoming

[1] Isaiah xi. 1–10.
[2] Isaiah xxxii. 1, 2; Jeremiah xxiii. 5, 6.
[3] Isaiah xl. 10, 11.
[4] Isaiah ix. 6, 7.
[5] Isaiah lii. 13; liii.
[6] Psalm cx.

one of us. "We are parochial little creatures; God must meet us in our parish if He is to meet us at all."[1] If He was ever to get into real touch with us He had to come on to our road and walk in step with us. Not that He could show all of Himself in this way. There are surely mysteries in His being which are beyond human understanding. There are glimpses of His activity, which He reveals to us in other ways—in the stars and the flowers, in a Shakespeare sonnet, in a Beethoven sonata, in a scientist's laboratory. But personal life is the one kind of life with which we are all of us thoroughly familiar. We think we know something of "nature"—of animals and plants—but what it is like to be a person—this we know, or think we know, "from A to Z." God in the star or in the lily fills me with wonder and steeps me in beauty, but He cannot, in this guise, talk to me in my own language. He cannot, thus, show me how to live.

So He came. "Love came down at Christmas." The very fact of Christmas—the old festival with its new meaning—is a witness. The

[1] Evelyn Underhill: *Man and the Supernatural*, p. 116.

Calendar itself adds its testimony, for there is no other explanation of the fact that we call this year 1928. It is not that number of years since history began. Civilization is much older. The human race is much older still. But though no meeting was held and no resolution was passed there seems to have been a tacit agreement in Western Europe that *that* event was so unique, so immensely significant for mankind, that it marks the Great Divide of all time. The story of the world is here separated into two parts—Before, and After ; and time must be counted afresh from this happening.

Nor is this all. There stands the objective fact of the uncounted multitude of men and women, through all these centuries, who have staked their all on the belief that then and there, in Christ, God entered history. That company of idealists and realists men call " the Church." Its existence has to be accounted for in any survey of the world to-day. Apart from the fact of Christ it would never have been heard of. Apart from the Resurrection of Christ it is inexplicable. For if the life of Jesus had come to an end on the first Good Friday the only memory left to His followers

would have been that of a life cut off in its prime ; a teacher—the greatest the nation had produced—silenced and crushed ; the noblest character they had ever known done to a felon's death ; in fact, the triumph of envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, and for themselves disappointment and disillusionment naked and complete. Not much of a foundation for a Church !

The Church has to be accounted for differently, and the only reasonable account is the one which its leaders themselves gave, namely, that Jesus was not dead, was more alive than ever, had held intercourse with them and had commissioned them to carry on His work and proclaim His Kingdom ; that by His Spirit He had welded them into a fellowship, and equipped them with power, and had sent them forth conquering and to conquer. To this central fact of history the witnesses are legion. Every village church and every cathedral through the length and breadth of Europe ; every missionary activity in Asia and Africa ; all that has received Christ's inspiration in music and painting and sculpture ; the vast enterprises of teaching and healing that find in Him their fountain-head—these and much else in

our laws and customs and conventions, even the very names we bear, join in offering their testimony, eloquent and unanswerable, to the fact that Jesus lived, and that Jesus lives.

Add to this the fact that of all the names which command the respect and reverence of men, both in East and West, there is none to compare with His; that His living Presence is the core and centre of the Church's worship and the Church's work; that for millions His love and His service is what makes life most worth living: then I say you are justified in believing that the stupendous words are true—for in what they state and in what they imply they are stupendous—"God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

IS GOD LIKE JESUS?

Chapter IV

"If Jesus Christ is a man,—
And only a man,—I say
That of all mankind I cleave to him,
And to him will I cleave alway.

If Jesus Christ is a God,—
And the only God,—I swear
I will follow Him through Heaven and hell,
The earth, the sea, and the air!"

The Song of a Heathen (sojourning in Galilee, A.D. 32).

RICHARD WATSON GILDER.

WE are getting now to close quarters with the vital question which it is the aim of this book to answer: What is God like? We have followed the direction of the signposts (in *Chapter II*). We have sat at the feet of those specialists in religion—the prophets of Israel (in *Chapter III*), and we have been brought up against the fact of the Church and have been compelled to ask how it may best be accounted for. That in its turn has brought us up against the fact of Christ, and we now have to ask how He may be accounted

for, and what precisely is the meaning to us of His life and teaching.

Here we are on well-trodden ground, and for that very reason we need to proceed the more carefully and thoughtfully. For the danger of falling into the ruts of convention is imminent. I mean that many people who (it may be) have not given much thought to Christianity are none the less familiar with its phrases. The exquisite Elizabethan English of the ordinary English New Testament falls on their ears like church bells across the fields. They are accustomed to it; they love it, but partly for that very reason they do not stop to think out its meaning and its implications. The same is true of the Creed. They learnt it when they were small; they say it even now in church, regularly or occasionally. But its real significance—what it says and what it suggests—to this they have given no very definite thought. It is all too easy for familiar words and phrases to make across the mind a beaten track so hard that nothing sinks in. And when the words are linked with the ceremonial of a public service the danger becomes the more acute, for then—whether it be Lesson or hymn or

Creed or prayer—they are part and parcel of an immemorial corporate action, and their true significance, historical or doctrinal, tends to drop into a very secondary place.

But this only by way of warning. For I want my reader to come to this question "without prejudice." If he is a believer in Christ, it will do him good to force himself to ask, Why? And if he is not a believer it may be that even this very inadequate putting of the case for faith may lead him a step or two in that direction. The point of our investigation is quite simply put. If Jesus were only an ordinary man (however great and distinguished) I shall not know *by looking at Him* what God is like. I should regard Him as a wonderful teacher, the greatest perhaps that the world has ever known, but the quality of His life would not necessarily be the quality of God's life. He might tell me a great deal about God, but I couldn't examine His character and say *that is the character of God.* If, on the other hand, I believe that Jesus, though completely human, was an exhibition of God; if His life was God's life lived in terms of manhood and in the circumstances which mankind is accustomed to; if His character

was (so to speak) God's character thrown upon the screen; if His outlook was God's outlook; His plan God's plan; His love for men God's love for men—then with all my human limitations I can say boldly and confidently, I look at Jesus, and *I know what God is like.*

Before taking you further I must clear the ground of one or two obstacles. And the first is that, unlike my ancestors, I do not believe that Jesus is divine because of His miracles. In the University of Cambridge, until recent years, among the subjects of the Preliminary Examination, commonly called the Little-Go, was Paley's *Evidences for Christianity.* The trend of this book may be summed up in this sentence: If the miracles are true, Jesus was divine. Whereas nowadays—I think more wisely—the argument is reversed: If Jesus was the kind of man whom the Gospels describe, then the miracles are credible. Paley argued from the miracles to the Personality; we argue from the Personality to the miracles. A far-off parallel might be something of this sort. We do not say, Because his soldiers were so devoted to him therefore Napoleon was a great man; but, Because Napoleon's personality was

so remarkable and so magnetic, therefore he won the devotion of his men. The new science of personality—psychology—is only in its infancy, but it has gone far enough to make us hesitate to set limits to the effect which might be produced by such a Personality as Christ's in the domain both of body and of mind.

The other preliminary statement I wish to make is that we are entitled to regard the records of Christ's life, at least in their main outlines, as authentic and reliable. An immense amount of work has been done by scholars in different countries—certainly not least in England—during the last century in tracking to its source or sources the information given us in the four Gospels. We know with practical certainty that St. Mark's is the oldest account which exists in the world today; that he was the "interpreter of Peter" and embodies the Apostle's reminiscences in his book; that there was a document used by St. Matthew and St. Luke which consisted mainly of our Lord's discourses; that both St. Matthew and St. Luke had St. Mark's account (or something very like it) before them when they wrote, and possibly this "sermon-document" too. If

my reader will take the trouble to look into it, he will find that large blocks of St. Mark's book are incorporated, almost unaltered, in St. Matthew and St. Luke, but that besides this, St. Matthew and St. Luke have both joint and particular material which is not to be found in St. Mark.[1] We know that St. Luke was at pains to collect accurate information for his book,[2] and that he had special access to people—including probably the Blessed Mother herself—whose stories of Jesus had naturally not up till then been made public. It is easy to write down the immortal story of the Infancy and what preceded it as "poetry," but there are facts involved, though they are touched with perfect delicacy and artistry, which cannot be lightly dismissed, and it is significant that in regard to his other book—the Acts of the Apostles—St. Luke is acclaimed by scholars as an historian of remarkable capacity and accuracy. And it is to be remembered that we owe to St. Luke a group of word-pictures which will last as long as there are human beings to read them—a group which

[1] For a popular account of this, see *Road-mending on the Sacred Way*, by J. M. C. Crum.

[2] See St. Luke i. 1–4.

includes The Lost Sheep, The Lost Coin, and The Prodigal Son. St. John is in a different category. His book was written, so far as we can gather, towards the end of his long life, and embodies the ripe thoughts and profound reflections of one who was the most intimate friend our Lord ever had. That is true, whether it was written by himself, or by some disciple or disciples in the circle which looked to him for guidance and inspiration.

That there are difficulties and inaccuracies is obvious. Were there two blind men at Jericho or one? Are the Feeding of the Five Thousand and that of the Four Thousand separate occasions, or are they two versions of the same incident? Who gives the original order of the special temptations which beset our Lord—St. Matthew or St. Luke? And which of them gives the most original version of the Lord's Prayer? It is not easy to put together into a connected story the incidents connected with the Resurrection. To anyone interested in ancient literature this relationship of the three "Lives" of Christ (for St. John, as I said, is in a class by himself) is one of the most difficult, as well as one of the most fascinating, problems in the world. It is the

supreme "crossword puzzle," for sometimes the words are the same in all three documents; sometimes they seem to be at cross-purposes; sometimes a word or a phrase or a verse is found in one document but "crossed-off" (so to speak) in one or both of the others.

Nevertheless, this is only what we should expect in the case of different accounts written by different men, for different readers, at different times, at a distance of between twenty and fifty years from the events which they record. If it be thought that this leaves too much room for legend to grow up we must remember (1) that in those days men trusted far more to their memories (as opposed to written documents) than we do; (2) that the three "Lives" are in substantial agreement as to the main facts of the Life—what Christ did and what Christ said; (3) that behind the Three, therefore, there was a framework of narrative (for all practical purposes St. Mark's Gospel) which must have been put together within a very few years of the Crucifixion; (4) that some of St. Paul's letters are earlier in date than any of the "Lives," and that his view of Christ is precisely what the "Lives" themselves lead up to;

and (5) that the story itself is such as to be utterly beyond the capacity of that age to invent if it were not a record of what actually happened. Moreover, we must remember that behind the records, and without which they would never have been written, was the living, glowing experience of men and women whose lives had been completely transformed by the historic, and to them present, Jesus Christ.

We may conclude therefore that on those three "Lives" we may rely for an authentic account of the facts about Christ, and that in the fourth we have an inspired interpretation of those facts, as they appeared to one who was himself an eye-witness but who had had time and opportunity to ponder their meaning in the light of the best thought of his day.

As we read these priceless documents, what is the impression we get of Jesus? This, in the first place, that He was really human. If this were not true it would be of little avail to ask whether He was divine, for it is in the fact that He is so much more completely human than we are that we have our first glimpses of His divinity. All that is most human in us reaches its height in

Him, whereas of all that is least human—our moral and physical deformities—He gives no sign.

Many people have made the profound mistake of supposing that to be fully alive to His humanity is somehow wanting in reverence for His person. The truth is that the more we recognize that He deliberately submitted to the limitations of humanity—the more His experience coincides with ours—the more amazingly He manifests the exceeding love of God. From the manger to the Cross He was a real man. There were things He could not do. "He could do no mighty works there, because of their unbelief." There were things He did not know. "Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, not even the Son, but only the Father." All our familiar human emotions are seen in Him; He could smile on the children; He could weep with the sisters at Bethany; He could look round on a crowd in fierce anger; He could quell His foes with a glance; He could show such unbounded sympathy and understanding that the commonest of people flocked to Him; the one longing of the afflicted was to get near Him.[1] As a public teacher and leader He went

[1] St. Mark v. 28.

through all the phases of high hope, wide popularity, and then doubt and disappointment as His influence (as it seemed) began to wane; leading inevitably to a complete break with the authorities, and at last death in its acutest form of agony both of mind and body.

We can hardly conceive what this "pilgrim's progress" must have meant to Him who even as a young lad felt the thrill of a great cause;[1] who increasingly compelled the attention of men and women and won the devotion of some of the choicest spirits among them; who believed that at every stage He was in accord with God's purpose,[2] but who, in spite of this, found it difficult to command the intelligent sympathy[3] of His followers, and who at the last was repudiated by His Church, disowned by His nation, and deserted by His friends. A very different path was available at any moment, had He chosen to take it. He had only to adopt the popular cry, "Down with Rome and up with Jewry," to be acclaimed from end to end of the country. He had only to be conveniently blind to the hypocrisy and the

[1] St. Luke ii. 49. [2] St. John iv. 34.
[3] St. Mark viii. 17; xiv. 27, 37.

worldliness which had eaten into the life of the Church to win the approbation of ecclesiastical circles. The door both to influence and to popularity in Church and State was standing open, and we cannot doubt that He felt its attraction. It is more than suggestive that in the specific temptations which assailed Him and of which some account has come down to us,[1] He was confronted with precisely this choice.

And there was much to be said for the easier course. To a man with a message nation-wide popularity is an asset not lightly to be disregarded. If a man is to secure a hearing it is no small advantage to be a *persona grata* with the Church. But He would bid for neither. His patriotism was at once deeper and loftier. It was concerned with God's purpose for the nation, not its predominance in the world. The time had come for the Jews to render their highest service to mankind, but their gaze was firmly fixed on political power. The Church had at last produced its perfect Flower, but its adherents had no eyes but for the weeds of bigotry and fanaticism. Church life in their view was a matter of rules and regulations; in His

[1] St. Matthew iv. 1–11; St. Luke iv. 1–13.

view it was a matter of unfettered love for God and unlimited love for man. This outlook they could not endure. So He was hounded to Calvary and the night He died the moral world (so it must have seemed) went straight to rack and ruin. For if *that* kind of character, *that* outlook on life, *that* personality, was to "end in smoke," then the moral universe was upside-down and life could no longer be worth living: "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." For obviously the real power, in that case, was in the hands, if not of actual evil, at least of blind chance.

But that life and that outlook did not "end in smoke." There was the Resurrection. A miracle, if you wish to call it so, but it would have been a greater miracle if He had *not* risen. Wonderful it was that there was such a life at all. More wonderful still would it have been if the supreme exhibition of Love, Holiness, Purity, and Heroism had been crushed for ever; if it had appeared for a few years only to be thrown on the world's scrap-heap, consigned to the limbo of lost causes and forgotten prophets. For in that case it would have seemed—and evidently for thirty-six hours the disciples had come to this conclu-

sion—that God had abdicated and evil was finally triumphant. It is not my business to go into detail as to the evidences for the Resurrection. It must suffice to remind my readers of three facts. First, that within six weeks of the event the very men whose hopes had been blasted by the death of their Master were proclaiming that He was with them again, more alive than ever, and that in the city where, *if the grave had not been empty*, they would have been confuted on the spot and howled down as liars and fanatics. Next, that without that incentive and inspiration the little society would never have spread as it did; still less would it have been able to face the opposition of the other religions already established on the ground, to say nothing of the whole might and majesty of imperial Rome. And thirdly, that there are more people in the world to-day than ever there were who believe, nay, who *know* that Jesus is living, and that in prayer and sacrament, as in hourly acts of faith, they make contact with Him and He with them.

But I would emphasize once again the fact that He was, and is, really human. He fought His temptations, not with "supernatural resources."

but with the same weapons that are available for us, prayer and discipline and trust in God. In the great race He "started from scratch." Indeed, the perfection of His character must have increased rather than diminished His sensitiveness to sin and therefore the strain of resistance. It requires an artist to be really alive to the imperfections of the picture, and the greater his love of beauty the more sensitive will he be as to the methods of its attainment. It is the accomplished musician who is most offended by the wrong note and who realizes to the full the horror of a discord. If Jesus had in His moral growth aids which are out of my reach, then He is no example for me, for He is not on the same level, He did not share the same experience. But we know it was otherwise. He was "in all points tempted like as we are," yet never once did He yield.

And with it all He was so homely. We do not always remember that He spent some thirty years out of a life which only lasted two years longer than that, or three at most, in a village; helping His mother in the house-work, later on apprenticed to His "father" at the carpenter's bench. He went

to the village school, attended the village church, joined in the village games, talked with the village men and women. Obviously He loved the open air and He loved talking to people, for later on, when He began to draw those word-pictures in which He framed His teaching, we find all His village experiences and His village friends figuring afresh. The sower [1] and the different kinds of soil, and the harvest,[2] and the housewife with her loaves and her yeast [3] and her lost coin,[4] and the shepherd and his sheep,[5] and the fisherman with his net,[6] and the children who wouldn't play,[7] and the bridesmaids who were late for the wedding,[8] and the bailiff who mismanaged the property,[9] and the "profiteer" who thought more of his barns than his soul.[10] He must have known, or known of, them all. If anyone was ever at home with ordinary people He was: watch Him at the Pharisee's dinner-table;[11] in His long conversation with "the woman with a

[1] St. Matthew xiii. 3–8.
[2] St. Matthew xiii. 30.
[3] St. Matthew xiii. 33.
[4] St. Luke xv. 8, 9.
[5] St. Luke xv. 4–6.
[6] St. Matthew xiii. 47, 48.
[7] St. Luke vii. 32.
[8] St. Matthew xxv. 1–12.
[9] St. Luke xvi. 1–8.
[10] St. Luke xii. 16–20.
[11] St. Luke vii. 36 *et seq.*

past" by the well-side ; [1] in His midnight talk with the professor of theology ; [2] confronting the sufferer who had touched Him in the crowd ; [3] meeting the funeral on the country road ; [4] helping His hostess over an awkward situation at a wedding ; [5] welcoming the children ; [6] dealing with the men who were trying to "down" Him ; [7] enjoying the hospitality of the two sisters at Bethany.[8] He never gives the impression of being flurried or at a loss. He is beautifully natural, yet He is always equal to every occasion. All His relationships, with friends or critics, are simple, straight, and sincere. He is infinitely considerate and sympathetic in His speech, yet He never beats about the bush, always goes straight to the point. He never talks like a visitant from another world—a ghost or an angel. He has both feet in this world and understands it through and through. He is, in fact, human to the last degree.

None the less there is something about Him that is anything but ordinary. "In the majesty and

[1] St. John iv. 7–26.
[2] St. John iii. 1 *et seq.*
[3] St. Mark v. 25–34.
[4] St. Luke vii. 12–15.
[5] St. John ii. 2–10.
[6] St. Matthew xix. 13, 14.
[7] St. Matthew xxii. 15–22.
[8] St. Luke x. 38–41.

tenderness of the figure depicted in the Gospels we are conscious of something august—as of One whose being is rooted in immensities." [1] His calm assumption of authority, for instance, would, in any other teacher, be irritating if not impertinent, but in Him it is entirely natural and even inevitable. Evidently He felt Himself entirely free to criticize and revise the current religious ideas of His time [2] and to promulgate what was practically a new version of the old law.[3] The prophets claimed to have received a "word of the Lord" and they prefaced their utterances with the bold affirmation "Thus saith the Lord," but Jesus goes far beyond this. His preface is not "Thus saith the Lord," but "*I* say unto you," thus deliberately appropriating the authority ascribed in the Old Testament to Jehovah. And this in a country and in a Church where the letter of the law was thought to be sacrosanct, where the worth of a teacher was gauged by his dependence on writers or speakers of earlier days, and where any interference with conventional notions was

[1] B. H. Streeter and others: *Adventure*, p. 137.
[2] St. Matthew xv. 1–20.
[3] St. Matthew v. 17–48.

keenly resented. No wonder that His audiences were filled with amazement.[1]

More astonishing still is the teaching itself. You cannot speak of Christ's moral code. It is tempting to do so, for it would save so much trouble. If only we could take His sayings as a book of rules, which is what many do and thereby miss their greatness and entangle themselves in unnecessary difficulties. That is not the way of the East. That is not His way. I remember walking one day along the river-bank at Benares. It was crowded with Indians, and among the groups as I passed I noticed a circle of young men seated in silence. "What are they doing?" said I to my friend. "They are waiting for their teacher, and meanwhile they are thinking." "What is the subject of the lesson?" "The art of life." That was the subject of Christ's lesson. He drew life's picture in large bold tones and left His hearers then and now to think out the meaning of the picture for their own particular circumstances. Instead of putting up a table of directions for the various situations of life, He placarded before His hearers great principles and

[1] St. Matthew vii. 28, 29.

each disciple was to use his "sanctified common sense" in applying them. "Give to everyone that asketh of thee." [1] "Love your enemies." [2]

If any man cometh unto me and hateth not his own father and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." [3] "To him that hath to him shall be given." [4] "If your right eye is a hindrance to you pluck it out and throw it away." [5] "When you give alms, let not your left hand know what your right hand is doing." [6] "If you had faith the size of a grain of mustard seed you could say to this hill, Move from here to there, and move it would; nothing would be impossible for you." [7]

There is an *élan* about all this. It is the call to a great adventure. It appeals to the man who would explore life as Scott would explore the South Pole or as Irvine and Mallory on Everest, "last seen going strong for the summit." There was that in Christ's love of spiritual adventure which was akin to the dare-devil (if I

[1] St. Matthew v. 42.
[2] St. Matthew v. 44.
[3] St. Luke xiv. 26.
[4] St. Matthew xxv. 29.
[5] St. Matthew v. 29.
[6] St. Matthew vi. 3.
[7] St. Matthew xvii. 20.

may so speak) in men like Drake and Hudson and Shackleton and Nansen. He could not do with niggly questions of casuistry. "Love God," He said, "with all your heart and soul and strength and mind, and love your neighbour as yourself."[1] What is more, He could not tolerate second-hand religion. *He would have men think for themselves.*

All this was astonishing enough, but more astonishing still is the fact that He filled the picture Himself. For the first time, and for all we know for the last time, there was seen on earth a moral teacher whose conduct corresponded precisely with His principles. His standard and His behaviour exactly coincided. He was flawless, but not with that negative perfection with which unfortunately we credit the saints. Only too often men's idea of sainthood is summed up in the verdict which any parish priest has often heard in the house of bereavement: "He never did anybody any harm." On the contrary, His perfection was positive, energetic, aggressive. It is vividly pictured in His own picture of the men who were entrusted with

[1] St. Mark xii. 30, 31.

the talents and who used them with varying success. When the man who had "done no harm to anyone"—but neither had he done any good—was brought up for sentence the verdict was terrific: "Take the good-for-nothing servant and throw him into the outer darkness . . ." He was not artificially perfect, that is, He was not precocious beyond His years. He had not an old head on young shoulders. He was perfect at each stage—He was all that a babe should be and all that a healthy boy should be, and all that a young man should be, facing the full responsibility of life. Like us, He had to learn, at home and at school, and still more in the school of experience. "Son though He was, He learned by all He suffered how to obey, and by being thus perfected He became the source of eternal salvation. . . ." [1] None can fathom those sufferings. Sufferings of mind and soul, they must have been, more than sufferings of body, though not many men would care to face the bodily suffering which He endured. Not least of those sufferings must have been the solitude in which He moved through life, for not even His nearest and dearest

[1] Hebrews v. 8, 9.

understood either His methods or His aims. They followed Him and they marvelled at Him, they even loved Him; but the sympathy which comes from insight and understanding they could not give.

For that He had to look elsewhere, and now we come to what was of course central in His life, His thought of God. For most of us any true thought of God brings with it a sense of our own inadequacy. Isaiah spoke and speaks for a great company when, finding himself in the presence of God, he cried, "Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips. . . ." Not so Jesus. He never appears to be conscious of any barrier between Himself and God. So far from that, He speaks as if in some sense God and Himself were interchangeable terms. For who but God could without unreality—preposterous unreality—promise "rest" to the "heavy-laden" of mankind;[1] light to the misguided;[2] peace to the troubled;[3] pardon to the sinner;[4] eternal life to the believer;[5] and imply throughout that these

[1] St. Matthew xi. 28.
[2] St. John viii. 12.
[3] St. John xiv. 27.
[4] St. Mark ii. 5.
[5] St. John xi. 25, 26.

blessings can only come through contact with *Himself*? Who else could calmly suggest that on their attitude to Himself depends the eternal welfare of nations and men,[1] or could describe Himself as, for all human-kind, "the Way, the Truth, and the Life"? [2]

If it be argued that these are the deductions of His friends rather than claims made by Himself, I reply that the impression is the same in all the Four, that no other tradition about Him has ever come to light; that it is endorsed by the man who would naturally least be disposed to endorse it (he as a Jew was fiercely monotheistic), and who preserved a complete independence of the other Apostles—St. Paul; [3] and that the impression has since been countersigned by the experience of seventy generations of Christians.

But there is another side to this. It is true that in some sense He identifies Himself with God, yet there is a distinction. Incessantly He speaks of God as Father, and His favourite title for Himself is Son of Man. Of necessity, as Man, with

[1] St. Matthew xxv. 34 ff.
[2] St. John xiv. 6.
[3] Philippians ii. 1–8; Colossians i. 14–18.

man's limited intelligence and outlook, He must needs think of God as some one other than Himself, some one to whom He could pray, whose plan was His objective, whose power could only be appropriated by faith and obedience. Nevertheless, His intimacy with this "Father" was, so far as we can tell, not different in kind, though very different in degree, from that which is available for us. It is evident at every turn of His career. It was so even in boyhood. "Did you not know that I had to be in my Father's house?" [1] It was so at the great moment when in Baptism He dedicated Himself to His task, for the deepest impression of which He was then conscious was the Father's approbation: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." [2] It was so at that exhilarating period of His public work when He found that the simple folk were beginning to respond to His message.[3] It was equally so when the sky was darkening and the shades of

[1] St. Luke ii. 49.

[2] St. Matthew iii. 17.

[3] "At that time Jesus spoke and said, 'I praise thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding all this from the wise and learned and revealing it to the simple-minded; yes, Father, I praise thee that such was thy chosen purpose.'" —St. Matthew xi. 25–26 (Moffatt's trans.).

opposition were closing in.[1] It was so in the last dreadful hour in the garden,[2] and He died with "Father" on His lips.[3] From first to last He was the perfect Son, trustful and obedient, and as such the Father's resources were supremely open to Him, as they are open to all His sons in so far as with child-like confidence in Him they identify themselves with His will and receive of His Spirit.

I have dared, most roughly and inadequately, to outline some of the traits in "the man Christ Jesus." What think you of Him? That is the question which sooner or later each generation—and every intelligent person—has to face. Was He the finest specimen of humanity, or was He something more—an untarnished reflection of God's Beauty? Was He God expressed in the only terms in which, on this little planet, we could understand Him—terms of human life? For the old dilemma still holds. If He was the best man

[1] "My soul is now disquieted. What am I to say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? Nay, it is something else that has brought me to this hour: I will say, 'Father, glorify thy name.'"—St. John xii. 27, 28 (Moffatt's trans.).

[2] St. Mark xiv. 35, 36.

[3] St. Luke xxiii. 46.

that ever was, and nothing more, He cannot be acquitted of using language which—to put it most mildly—was grossly exaggerated, and of a self-assertion which, on this supposition, was the result of fanaticism run wild. That He was thus deluded is well-nigh incredible when you mark the balance of His mind and the perfect sanity of His judgment. Was He, whose valuation of persons and things is universally acclaimed, utterly mistaken in His valuation of Himself? One thing at least is certain. No straight-thinking man can conceive God in loftier terms than the character of Jesus. If to me He has not "the value of God" then nothing has, or can have. For as I have said, we can only estimate God in terms of personality. To the birds (if they could think) God would have to be the perfect bird; to the animals the perfect animal. So to me it is useless to talk of the value of God unless you can produce a man whom (so to speak) I can measure, and examine, and if I find him flawless, can worship.

After all, there comes a point—and perhaps we have reached it—when argument can carry you no further. The fact of Jesus is there; the fact

of the Church and its experience; the fact of nineteen centuries of homage; the fact of His acknowledged pre-eminence in the modern mind. And "facts are the unsettling things." It is for each man to draw his own conclusion. If that conclusion is the conclusion which was drawn by the Apostles and by the Society of Christ from that day to this, then we have discovered—and each of us has to make the discovery for himself—the greatest truth that mortal mind has ever reached. We have discovered the answer to the question that for centuries half the world is asking: What is God like? For if Jesus is the image of God, then God is like Jesus, and that means that He is knowable, understandable, lovable.

This is what He said Himself, and it is in words which put the whole great matter in a single sentence: "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." It is hardly possible to study that portrait in the four Gospels without coming to the same conclusion. As in the case of all true art, it is not so much a matter of intellectual deduction as of intuition, in which spirit, intellect and emotions are all involved. It is the feeling of

which the well-known story of Charles Lamb is a fit illustration. One day he fell into a discussion with a company of literary men, of whom Hazlitt, who tells the story, was one, as to the persons they would like to have met. After naming almost every possible name in the gallery of fame, worthy and unworthy, Charles Lamb said in his stuttering way, "There is only One I can ever think of after this . . . if Shakespeare was to come into the room, we should all rise to meet him; but if that Person was to come in we should all fall and try to kiss the hem of His garment." In saying that Lamb spoke for millions. From the matter-of-fact Thomas—"My Lord and my God!"—to the Emperor Constantine—"What mortal is he who shall worthily declare Thy praise?" [1]—on through the ages to another Emperor, Napoleon—"I know men; and I tell you that Jesus Christ was not a man. Everything in Him astonishes me . . . He is truly a being by Himself."[2]—until the company swells to a multitude, "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands" in every land and in every century,

[1] Sir James Marchant: *Anthology of Jesus*, p. 347.
Ibid., p. 275.

who join in the great ascription which in these modern days is more than ever on men's lips:

> Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ,
> Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father.

We look at Christ, and we know what God is like.

"WHY DOESN'T GOD KILL THE DEVIL?"

Chapter V

". . . God Almighty!
There is some soul of goodness in things evil
Would men observingly distil it out."
Henry V, Act IV, Sc. i.

BUT is He? Is God like Christ? For if He is, then how do you account for evil? It is true that every thinking man must face the fact of Christ. But there is another fact that he cannot help facing, unwelcome, disconcerting, relentless, it looms before him—the fact of evil. Like a hideous octopus it fastens its tentacles upon every individual, every society, every relationship of life, and with that poisonous clutch come its attendant abominations of sin, pain, disease, and death. For if God is like Christ, then surely He cannot and will not tolerate evil. Yet it continues, and to all appearances its grasp is in no way relaxed. "Why doesn't God kill the devil?" asked the small boy, and we all applaud the question. For if

God is all-powerful and yet does not kill the devil, He cannot be good. And if He is good and doesn't kill the devil then He can't be all-powerful. But if He is all-good and all-powerful and yet does not kill the devil, what then? Why then we are "up against it" with a vengeance. For directly you have led me to think that God is like Christ you suggest a very good reason for thinking He is not.

As a fact the problem is not quite so simple, as a moment's thought will show. If God is like Christ, one thing at least is certain, He is out for goodness. But what is goodness, and how is goodness produced? The first point about goodness is that it is a *personal* quality. That word "good" in its proper setting can only apply to a person, not a thing or even a scene. Of course we use the word in a slipshod way. If a man says that his tobacco is good, he really means that it is fragrant to smoke. If a teacher says that her pupil's piano-playing is good, she means that it is accurate, tasteful, soulful. Neither of these examples are concerned with any moral quality, except that the qualities needed to produce a good

pianist, such as attention and perseverance, are in some sense moral. The same is true in, for instance, the case of a wonderful view. An Alpine peak has beauty, not goodness. But my mother may be good as well as beautiful. The Southern Railway call their best express engines by the names of good men, the Knights of Arthur's Round Table. The man Sir Galahad was good, but not the engine. The engine may be said to be fine, powerful, effective, even beautiful, but not, in a moral sense,[1] "good."

Goodness, as I say, requires a *person*. But if a person is good, he can only be good by choice. In other words, goodness can only be produced by the deliberate action of a responsible person. All life is a series of choices. Some are unimportant, like choosing a tie or a frock. Some are serious, like the choice of a profession. Some are vital, where the choice lies between good and evil, between right and wrong. Every choice, even the unimportant ones, goes to the

[1] This relevant distinction between beauty and goodness must not be taken to imply that beauty, and truth, lie in a kind of No-man's Land between good and evil. They—truth and beauty—are as much in opposition to evil as that which is morally good.

building of character. If I may add one stage to the old adage it is just as true

> "Sow a choice, reap an act;
> Sow an act, reap a habit;
> Sow a habit, reap a character;
> Sow a character, reap a destiny."

And this power of reasoned choice—this moral responsibility—is man's glory. It differentiates him from the animals. It is the hall-mark of the divine, for he was "made in the image of God." But *it involves the possibility of evil.* Otherwise it is no choice. To "choose the high road" involves the possibility of "choosing the low road."

But, you may say, why didn't God make it impossible to "choose the low road"? The answer to that surely is that God prefers men to machines. Presumably He could have created beings that could only be good, that is, could have no choice. That would have brought us back to the old difficulty of determinism, only man's course would have been determined not by heredity or environment, but by God. God would have (so to speak) laid down the rails of rectitude and the human vehicle would have had no option but to run

on them. "Not exactly a 'bus but a tram," as we said before. But goodness that is not willing goodness, not the result of deliberate choice, is no goodness at all, any more than the heroism of a soldier who advances because he knows that if he does not he will be instantly shot is heroism. Goodness was and is not worth while at the price of freedom, and I conceive that the Designer of humanity would rather see men free and *possibly* evil than good because they were compelled to be good.

And there is more in it than that. For an integral element in goodness is love. The only goodness God could value is the goodness of men who choose it and love it for its own sake; the only love He cares about (or we care about, for that matter) is the love of persons who love Him for His own sake, and loving Him, are good. But this goodness could only be had at a terrible risk, the risk of evil getting a footing in the world. That was the price to be paid. Who are you, and who am I, to say it wasn't worth it? In the smaller affairs of life we do not hesitate to run such risks. The father or mother who reads these words will prefer to send their

boy to a school where he will have to "fight his own battles" and thereby, as they hope, gain moral strength, rather than to keep him at home in a "sheltered" existence, where, even if he avoids grosser temptations, he will probably turn into a soft, namby-pamby kind of creature.

For us short-sighted people it is impossible to see the whole field or the vast issues involved, still less are we in a position to say what God ought or ought not to have done in bringing this wonderful human race into existence. What we can see is that without the possibility—indeed the fact—of evil there could have been no moral growth. Just as the resistance of the air and the force of gravitation makes possible the development of the muscle in my arm, so the existence of evil makes possible the development of that moral "muscle" which is the very material of character, and by which alone goodness can be produced.

The question then is this. If evil could not (in this sense) be prevented, how can it be cured? Abolish it? But you can't do that, unless you abolish free-will as well, and deprive man of

his power of choice. The only alternative is to counteract it. This can be done in one of two ways. It can be done by force. You can threaten the boy with the birch; you can clap the criminal into gaol. But this method only deals with the manifestations of evil. It does not go deep enough. It does not "touch the spot." You must go further and appeal to the man's conscience. His conscience is on the side of right. It can be guided and stimulated by laws and rules, and this will in many cases be effective. Most nations and religions have tried, and still try, this method, and with considerable success. As an aid to civilization and to the observance of the amenities of "community life" this method is invaluable. But as a counteraction to the world's evil, and as an effective instrument for producing goodness, it is not adequate. To tell a man what he ought to do is not the same thing as making him want to do it, and it is the "will to goodness" which we must secure, if any real progress is to be made and the victory ultimately won. There was once a man with a very sensitive conscience. He was faced with a law of life for which he

had the most profound respect, for he believed it came from God. He set himself to obey that law, as many a man has before and since. He was "out for goodness." But he found it a desperate fight. This is his account of it.

> "The Law is spiritual; we know that. But then I am a creature of the flesh, in the thraldom of sin. I cannot understand my own actions; I do not act as I want to act; on the contrary, I do what I detest. . . .
> For in me (that is, in my flesh) no good dwells, I know; the wish is there, but not the power of doing what is right. I cannot be good as I want to be, and I do wrong against my wishes." [1]

That does not sound like a "will to goodness"! How then is that "will" to be achieved? The answer is it can only be achieved by a personal relationship. A man will accomplish a task or embark on an adventure for the wife he loves when nothing else would induce him to look at it. A mother's love has kept many a man straight when no rules or regulations would have had the slightest effect. Love of king and country will, as we know too well, send men to suffering and death who have no natural love of adventure and who loathe the

[1] Romans vii. 14, 15, 18, 19 (Moffatt's trans.).

very thought of war. In other words, love must come upon the scene.

And love has come upon the scene. For if it is really true that God is like Christ, then that puts a totally new complexion on the whole affair, and we have already seen good reasons for believing that God is like Christ. It makes it clear, in the first place, that God is personally and deeply concerned in the difficulty. He is not standing aloof. So far from being indifferent to the problem, He has come right into the middle of it Himself. If that is true it puts new heart into us at once. I remember a story of two officers in a war hospital, both badly wounded. The one said to the other, "I don't care whether I come through or not. I'm sick of the war and the world and everything and everybody." "I feel rather like you," said the other, "and yet I don't, for there's some one who very much cares whether I get through . . . there's a girl somewhere in Scotland . . ." If there's a God who does care intensely whether we get through, then all things—and particularly this problem of evil—begin to look very different.

For if God is like Christ, what does it mean? It means that in this incessant fight God has come into action. This is not a matter of opinion or of a picturesque imagination. It's a matter of history. Go back to the big Four, and watch Christ, and as you watch, say to yourself, This is God in action. In fact when He was among us He was never out of action. Watch Him in action against that combination of physical and moral disease which is as common to-day as it was then. I print the full account of this, for it is typical.

"When he entered Capharnahum again after some days it was reported that he was at home, and a large number at once gathered, till there was no more room for them, not even at the door.

He was speaking the word to them, when a paralytic was brought to him; four men carried him, and as they could not get near Jesus on account of the crowd they tore up the roof under which he stood and through the opening they lowered the pallet on which the paralytic lay.

When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'My son, your sins are forgiven.' Now there were some scribes sitting there who argued in their hearts, 'What does the man mean by talking like this? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins, who but God alone?'

Conscious at once that they were arguing to themselves in this way, Jesus asked them, 'Why do you argue thus in your hearts? Which is the easier thing, to tell the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven," or to tell him, "Rise,

> lift your pallet, and go away?" But to let you see the Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins'—he said to the paralytic, 'Rise, I tell you, lift your pallet, and go home.'
> And he rose, lifted his pallet at once, and went off before them all: at this they were all amazed and glorified God saying, 'We never saw the like of it!'" [1]

That was God in action for the rescue and reformation of a man, soul and body. It was the same in the case of others who were deformed, whether physically or otherwise—indeed it was and is impossible to draw a hard and fast line between the physical and the spiritual—the blind,[2] the incurable invalid,[3] the raving maniac,[4] even the dead.[5] Nor was the action any less energetic and drastic in the cases where the ailment was predominantly spiritual. Watch Him as He deals with the young man whose wealth was his bane,[6] or with the woman of the street,[7] or with the men whose emotions had run away with them,[8] or with the poor robber at his last gasp.[9]

These are only a few of the recorded instances of God in energetic action against every kind

[1] St. Mark ii. 1–12 (Moffatt's trans.).
[2] St. Mark viii. 22–26; St. Luke xviii. 35–43.
[3] St. John v. 1–9.
[4] St. Mark v. 1–20.
[5] St. Luke vii. 11–17.
[6] St. Mark x. 17–23.
[7] St. Luke vii. 37–50.
[8] St. Luke ix. 57–62.
[9] St. Luke xxiii. 39–43.

of "ill that flesh is heir to," and there must have been many more cases not recorded at all. However we may "explain" the "treatment," the impression throughout is irresistible. It is that here is a Man of amazing sympathy, of uncanny understanding, of unfaltering capacity, who never spared Himself in the battle against evil. Along the whole front and in every instance He brought against it the whole energy of aggressive Love, the like of which has never been seen before or since.

At the climax He went into the thickest of the fray single-handed. There, on the green hill outside Jerusalem, was launched Love's last and greatest offensive. Against Him, at that dread hour, there was a concerted attack designed to crush Him finally. He had to face the full blast of religious bigotry, and that from the men who should have been the first to honour Him; of civil injustice—at the hands of the representative of the power that prided itself on its fair dealing; of popular execration, for whatever might be the case in Galilee, the Jerusalem mob took their cue from the Church authorities. And at that tense moment He

was betrayed by one friend and deserted by the others, and a few hours later He almost felt Himself deserted by God Himself.

He died, and He won. For at long last Love cannot be defeated. With what result? With this result, that whatever may be said about the origin of evil we know now what God thinks about it; we know now that God went all lengths to defeat it. We know that there is only one weapon that cannot fail, and that is Love. That if God was out on the battle-field then, He is out on the battle-field now, and that whereas then He took the field alone, now He looks to His comrades in Christ's Fellowship, for through them the fruits of His victory must be gathered in.

Here is the desperately needed counteraction of which I spoke. And it is one whose effect has been and is literally unbounded. It is what Dr. Chalmers called the "expulsive power of a new affection." It is put quite simply in Mrs. Alexander's hymn:

> "Oh! dearly, dearly has He loved
> And we must love Him too;
> And trust in His redeeming blood,
> And try His works to do."

There have been many theories to explain the death of Christ. But what matters is not the explanation, but the fact. For in so living, and so dying, and so loving, Jesus made possible a wholly new relationship to God. God knew what man was like, yet He thought him worth an infinite love, nor did He flinch from the cost of translating that love into action. Man now knows what God is like as he "surveys the wondrous Cross," and the way is open for the meeting at that "trysting-place." Father and son, son and Father.

For in ways past our understanding, in the action of that Man all mankind was involved. He involved Himself, sinless, in our sin. He involved us, sinful, in His perfection. Looking on His Son the Father looks on all the sons, not as they are now, wretchedly imperfect, but as He can make them, if through His Spirit He can have His way with them. On their part, waking up to the wonder of their sonship, they respond to that love, and through that love their transformation proceeds apace. For there is nothing so potent as love for the re-making of character. The spirit of Jesus takes them in hand, and as

they "obey His godly motions" they become channels and instruments by which, through the same love, the powers of evil may be still further beaten back, and the Kingdom of God set up.

I have been speaking of moral evil—what the Bible calls "sin"—but what has been said applies no less to Pain, which in its way is sometimes a still more perplexing problem. It is not difficult to philosophize about its necessity. It would seem to be as much a necessity of progress as the possibility of evil is a necessity of goodness. With pain man comes into the world. Painfully he learns his lessons. Only with pain and toil can he attain the full stature of his manhood. Hardly a step forward in commerce, in mechanical invention, in science —and not least the science of healing—but has been attended by pain. The long process of evolution is stained with the blood of sacrifice. Nature, in some of its aspects, is indeed "red in tooth and claw." Yet the pain of hunger has been in large measure the incentive to animal development and even to animal beauty. "The pursuing wolf-pack gave to the horse its swiftness and its strength. The leopard's claw

gave to the antelope its surpassing grace and agility."[1] Yet the problem is not thereby solved. It is often unnecessary. The railway accident or the collision at sea may be caused by man's carelessness. An epidemic may spread through the negligence of a public authority. Further, even when pain is seemingly avoidable, it is unevenly and unfairly distributed. This was the form in which the problem presented itself in old days and presents itself still. Why do good people often suffer, and bad people often prosper? The Old Testament puts the matter caustically in the well-known Psalm:

"What does God care?
How can the Almighty heed—when these,
the godless, prosperously fare,
thriving thus at their ease?
'Tis all in vain I kept my heart from stain,
kept my life clean,
when all day long blows fell on me,
and every dawn brought me some chastening!"[2]

The Book of Job is a drama with the same perennial question for its *motif*. In both cases no specific solution is suggested, but the answer

[1] Archbishop d'Arcy: *God and the Struggle for Existence*, p. 27.
[2] Psalm lxxiii. 11–14 (Moffatt's trans.).

(in both cases) lies in the character of God. Infinite in wisdom and in power, He can be trusted in spite of appearances to the contrary. The magnificent lines in which this is expressed must be quoted:

"When my heart was sour,
when I felt sore,
I was a dull, stupid creature,
no better than a brute before thee.
Yet I am always beside thee;
thou holdest my right hand,
guiding me with thy counsel,
leading me after thyself by the hand.
Whom have I in heaven but thee?
On earth I care for nothing else.
Body and soul may fail,
but God my strength is mine for evermore." [1]

At this point the New Testament takes up the question, and its answer is the same, only much more so, for if God is like Christ, if life is a much greater matter than this earthly span, then the problem is seen in a totally new setting and in a completely altered perspective. For what we saw was true about evil is also true about pain. God has not offered a full and complete explanation, but He has acted in a way far more effective and far more satisfying.

[1] Psalm lxxiii. 21–26 (Moffatt's trans.).

He has come upon the scene Himself, has Himself endured the keenest suffering of mind and body, and at the Cross has demonstrated for all time that suffering in its worst form—cruel, agonizing, unjust, undeserved—could be the very method and instrument of the world's redemption. Pain itself gave the finishing touch to the exhibition of God's love. If this is true, and if "God was in Christ" is true, then we know that in God's scheme for the renovation of man, and indeed of all nature, pain has a place. So far from being merely a curse or calamity, it can be made to serve the interests of that better age that is to be, it is the "growing pains" which herald the

> "One far-off divine event
> To which the whole creation moves."

Experience shows that pain is enormously affected—its impact is greatly lessened or increased—by the mental attitude of the sufferer, and thereby it has very different results on different people. This is true, as all the world knows, in regard to the cure of disease. From Coué and his use of the imagination to the more definitely Christian use of "suggestion," we

know, in a way our forefathers never did, that it is the mind that matters. The same pain will drive one patient to despair and resentment, with another it will be a veritable "vocation" to a patience and an unselfish endurance which is inspiring to watch and creative in its effects. It all depends on the kind of "suggestion" which the man receives and makes his own. For the man who believes not only that God is like Christ, but that in Christ God was incarnate, the "suggestion" is that in suffering he may take his share in that redemption at which God is incessantly at work, and for the sake of which God suffers—for the Cross is not an isolated event, it is the emergence under historical conditions of God's unchanging attitude. As long as there is sin to be dealt with, pain to be transformed, and death to be abolished, so long there can be no respite for the suffering love at the heart of the Eternal.

We have seen (darkly but definitely) that sin and suffering are not God's fault. They were involved in His stupendous experiment in giving man the capacity for moral responsibility. More than that, He came into the world in

person in order to give life its true valuation, to draw the lines on which life can be all that He intended it to be, both personal and social. A large part of the pain which men have to face comes from the refusal, both of nations and individuals, to proceed on those lines and follow that pattern. If men prefer to settle their differences by destroying one another in war; if they use their God-given brains for the invention of deadly instruments of destruction; if they neglect ordinary precautions against disease; then God is not to be blamed: yet with consummate skill He can make even their follies and mistakes to minister to their good. They can rise on stepping-stones of their stupid selves—as well as their dead selves—to higher things and wiser ways.

We come back again to the Cross. There it is plain that in spite of all his sin and stupidity God thinks man of infinite value; that He faced His own unspeakable suffering precisely that man might be re-made; and as a fact this supreme event in human history has proved to have this re-making power on an amazing scale. For the Cross is the

"last word" in the love of God, and because of that it breaks sin, transfigures pain, and so illuminates the dark places of life that man, seeing what God is like, starts anew along life's path "ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven," and free for the service of his fellows.

An old master of mine once gave me a useful piece of advice. He said, "Never let what you don't know disturb what you do know." There is much that we don't know, and can't explain. But looking at Jesus, and looking at the Cross, there is one thing that we do know. We know that God is love.

GOING INTO ACTION

GOING INTO ACTION

Chapter VI

"The finding of God is the beginning of service. It is not an escape from life and action; it is the release of life and action from the prison of the mortal self."

H. G. WELLS.

"A life which, immersed in the stream of history, is yet poised on the eternal world."

EVELYN UNDERHILL.

IN the preceding chapters I have tried to answer the question, What is God like? If the answer I have given is true, then it is time to ask, What about it? What are the consequences? That was the question asked when Copernicus made his great discovery, when Darwin traced out the descent of man, when Einstein sprung upon the world his famous theory. If the earth goes round the sun; if nature took the course that Darwin mapped out; if the theory of relativity is correct —*What does it mean for me?* So we say, dealing with a far more fundamental question: If in Jesus we see God, what does it mean? First and foremost it means that God's character is established.

That sounds impertinent, but until we knew that Jesus was the finished portrait of God we could never be quite certain. We could guess and speculate and hope, but now we know. We need no longer be agnostic—not-knowing. Our faith has an object which is reliable. After all, it is our confidence in men's characters that makes possible the ordinary business of life. The business man assumes the credit of his bank, that is, of his banker; and deposits his money there without a qualm. The sailor, believing in the integrity of the shipowner and the capacity of the captain, signs on and steps on board. So we, believing in the character of God, as unveiled in Jesus, commit ourselves without misgiving to certain results which inevitably follow.

The first result is the conviction, issuing at once in experience, that fellowship with such a God must be the highest attainment of man. "What is the chief end of man?" asks the Westminster Confession. And rightly and magnificently it answers: "To glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever." That fellowship is only possible because God wants it more than we do. For if Christ's word-pictures are windows by which we see into

the mind of God, then look at His pictures of the lost sheep [1] and the lost coin [2] and the lost son.[3] The gist of them all is that God will leave no path unsearched, no corner unswept, no sin unforgiven, if only He can restore His fellowship with the men and women whom He loves. Let the immortal words be set down once more. "'I will arise and go to my father and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned. I am no more worthy to be called thy son.' And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet afar off his father saw and was moved with compassion and arose and fell on his neck and kissed him." If that is God, is it possible for any son to prefer the "far country" to the father's fellowship? When this fellowship is thus restored, when a man, waking up to this untiring God, thus changes his mind and alters his life, the effect is significant and far-reaching, for, according to Christ, "there is joy in the presence of the angels." Twice over this mysterious exhilaration is asserted. Whatever else it suggests it makes it clear that the tone in that world (if I may so speak) is intimately con-

[1] St. Luke xv. 3–7. [2] St. Luke xv. 8–10.
[3] St. Luke xv. 11–32.

nected with the harmony between man and God in this one. When a man responds to the love of God here it somehow sets joy-bells ringing there. For each such response, however humble, is one discord less in God's universe, one step nearer to the final harmony, when God and man and nature shall be perfectly attuned.

There is nothing vague about this restored fellowship. It is precisely the fellowship which we can best understand—the family fellowship. "As many as received Him"—these are the words of St. John's Gospel, "to them gave He the right to become sons of God, even to them that believe on His Name, who were born . . . not of the will of the flesh . . . but of God."[1] Set alongside those words the equally moving words of St. Paul:[2] "You have received no slavish spirit that would make you relapse into fear; you have received the Spirit of sonship, and . . . we cry, 'Father! Father!'"[3]

That relationship, made possible by the perfect Son, was emphasized and countersigned by Him in

[1] St. John i. 12, 13.

[2] Romans viii. 15 (Moffatt's trans.).

[3] The word "Abba" is the Aramaic for "father," and was the language commonly spoken by our Lord.

those "sensitive contacts" which we call Sacraments. For whatever else baptism means, it means the entrance into the Eternal Father's family circle, and among all the meanings of the Holy Supper this at least is pre-eminent: it is the children gathering at the Father's Board, there to be partakers of that Life which through His Son's death upon the Cross became available for all.

Again I say, let us get away from the conventional and the customary. For the most startling news ever heard by mortal man has been hidden in the musty wrappings of formality and minimized by the parrot repetition of those who hear it but never act upon it. Is your mind "cleared of cant"? Then think hard what a son of God should think and do.

In the first place, he will have a growing sympathy with the Father's mind. And for this he must study the outlook of *the* Son. For it is plain that Jesus put a new valuation on life. He reproduced the Father's estimate and it was revolutionary. The surprise or the disappointment, as the case may be, when a valuation takes place after a death, is one of the commonplaces of family affairs: but when Christ made His estimate of

life's valuables, such as property, position, ancestry, popularity, the ordinary tariff was reversed. He pronounced them all valueless *except in so far as they can be made to minister to character.* He made it plain that all life's assets could be summed up in one priceless possession—Love; and that the only credit a man can "run up" in the one account that matters is the service of others. From His day to ours that valuation has been written off as visionary and impractical, but every man and every nation that has clung to the conventional tariff—self first and last and all the time—has paid a heavy bill (in deterioration of character, if not in actual calamity) in the long run.

The fact is that this estimate—that Love is the supreme asset—is the Creator's estimate, and presumably He knows. The expert in art or in music is on the whole most likely to know the value of the painting or the composition, but here we have to do with the infallible expert in life's "real estate." Indeed it is obvious that if nations or groups were to act on this valuation wars would at once become unthinkable and our social and industrial troubles would find a speedy solution. It is the pain as well as the joy of the

sons of God that they accept their Father's estimate in a world which on the whole rejects it. They are loyal to His standard. They accept Christ's way of life—service not self, in the fullest sense—whether they act as groups or individuals, in their business or in their homes. For the grave point about this valuation is that it is the only one that holds good in the other world. If you are going abroad a good deal depends upon the foreign exchange. That is, how far will the assets in your bank or your pocket count for the same, or anything like the same, in that other country? But each of us one day will "go abroad." We shall find ourselves in a world from which humbug has been completely banished, a world of stark reality. An eternal world. It is wise to work by its values here. If not, on arrival there, it may be awkward.

The son of God seeks to know his Father's mind. He accepts His valuation; he lives in the light of an eternal environment to which he already belongs. But this cultivation of God's mind and outlook (I use human pictures) takes time and pains. The art of knowing God depends, like all other arts, on the attention it receives. We can-

not, of course, attend to everything. Therefore we choose what we will attend to. Many people leave out God from the field of attention and are surprised that for them religion does not amount to much. But this faculty for knowing God, like the faculty of drawing or of playing the piano (though it is on a far higher level), can be trained. It is a matter of "attention" or "suggestion." We can all command the entrance into our minds. The ideas we admit colour our thoughts and therefore our behaviour; and these ideas, as often as not, come through what we read. This makes it important that in our reading we should consort with the kings and queens and not with the gutter-snipes. And at the top of the list we shall put the Bible simply because it is, more than any writing, the treasure-house of ideas about God. I have already said enough about that book, I hope, to whet my reader's appetite for it. But it must be read thoughtfully and systematically.[1]

Undoubtedly the supreme effort of "attention" to God is that which is commonly called prayer.

[1] There are many such systems, such as the Calendar of Lessons, and associations like the Scripture Union. But the best system is to take a book at a time and study it in a modern translation.

It was the breath of life to the Son of God. It cannot be less than that to the sons. It consists of concentrating one's thoughts on God, opening our minds to the suggestions of His Spirit—in fact, "listening in" to the Father. For what God says to us in prayer is at least as important as what we say to Him, and for this reason the Bible is the best "prayer manual." In prayer the sons talk to the Father, and since we cannot consciously do this all day, we do it deliberately at certain moments. It is vital to do so in the morning: so that the first "suggestion" that enters our heads, the first impression made upon our minds, comes not from the newspaper, or the letters, or our friends at breakfast, but from God. Confiding in that Father in the morning gives a tone to the whole day.

"Give Him thy first thoughts
So shalt thou keep
Him company all day,
And in Him sleep."

If He has much to say to His son the son will have much to say in return. We realize more than we did the possibilities of communication between mind and mind. If this is so between ordinary human minds, must it not be much more potent

and more far-reaching when the human mind seeks contact with God's mind, when the son lays himself open to the Father's influence?

This process of prayer is social as well as individual. There is such a thing as a "group-consciousness," that is, people met together for a definite purpose develop an "atmosphere"; they achieve a power of perception greater than the sum total of their separate capacities. Christ seems to have provided for this, for His greatest utterances about prayer assume that "Two shall agree," [1] or that "two or three shall be gathered together." [2] The one prayer He taught was a prayer for men to use together—"After this manner pray ye . . ." [3]—and the only act of worship He commanded was a social act.[4]

Worship is the core and centre of prayer. Man longs to adore. To approach such a God as this, a God like Jesus, the Eternal Father, who could do otherwise than adore!

> "How wonderful, how beautiful,
> The sight of Thee must be;
> Thine endless wisdom, boundless power,
> And awful purity."

[1] St. Matthew xviii. 19.
[2] St. Matthew xviii. 20.
[3] St. Matthew vi. 9–13.
[4] St. Mark xiv. 22–25.

Prayer then, in its highest aspect, is approaching God, not for what you can get out of Him, but because you just cannot help delighting in Him for what He is in Himself. But this means knowing Him—in Christ. Not that we are *not* to bring our petitions for ordinary and mundane needs. An earthly father is delighted if his child confides in him even about the most trivial matters. Shall the Eternal Father be otherwise, the God who in Jesus Himself experienced " the trivial round, the common task " ?

That there can be such a relationship of love between mortal man and the Eternal God is indeed almost unbelievable ; were it not for Christ it would be incredible, impossible. But if the Father's sons would understand it, they must act on it. For one thing, their lives must take on a new quality. For " men become like that which they sincerely reverence," and " it is the Spirit of Christ in man which gives that highest quality to life, and no terms outside the Christian vocabulary can describe it. We call it Christ-likeness." [1] In other words, life inspired by that Spirit in the sons of God has a timeless quality ;

[1] *The Times*, January 14, 1928.

it is current coin in eternity as well as in time. In this sense it is true to say that eternal life begins here and now. "The Kingdom of God is coming, now. To enter it you must become a son of God. To become a son of God, you must believe you are a son of God. To believe you are a son of God means you must act like a son of God. To act like a son of God means many things. But chief of all it means this: That you must trust your Father utterly, and behave to every man as to a beloved brother, knowing that he also is a son of God." Thus a modern writer [1] speaks of this relationship and of the quality of life which results therefrom.

And this life must needs be buoyant, joyous, radiating. For the business of the sons of God is not merely to be "receivers." They must be "transmitters." Reading lately the *Life of Sir Arthur Sullivan*, I noted with admiration the time and trouble which he and Gilbert devoted to training the company, orchestra and all. For it was they, actors and musicians, who, receiving the wit and the music which germinated in those two agile brains, were to "put it across" to the British

[1] Middleton Murry: *The Life of Jesus*, p. 45.

public. The transmitters were not originators, or geniuses, but they were indispensable if the captivating ideas were to "get across." So with the sons of God. In this sense they are indispensable to Him, for He has pleased to select and use men for getting His ideas—His love—"across" to human-kind. And the son will do this primarily by making every phase of his life an expression of his sonship. The way he behaves at home; the way he does his work; the way he deals with his fellows; the way he resists his temptations; the way he meets his difficulties; the way he faces his trials—all these are determined and coloured by the fact that he is a son, sure of the Father's care, relying on the Father's power. His behaviour in all these circumstances will make the "radio" of his influence, and though he may *say* very little, his whole tone will be a veritable "loud speaker" in his home and in the circle in which he moves.

But he has a wider responsibility even than this. There is a transmitting which can only be done by the whole Family acting together, and each son is expected to do his part. But the Family is sadly divided, and thereby its "transmitting" is grievously hampered. If these "unhappy divis-

ions" are to be healed there must be, in the various branches of the Family, a new penitence for our culpable disunion, a new vision of the Church that is to be, a new and passionate desire to know and achieve the unity which Christ wills. So only can each prepare, in the way it believes best, for the great Coming Together.[1] The Family must act together; the Church must present a united front, if we are adequately to transmit the Father's mind and message in regard to those corporate activities of life,[2] international, social, and industrial, which loom so large in our day. How can the Church effectively preach fellowship to the world until it has more of that very thing within its own borders?

The need of our community-life is obvious—a will to righteousness; and if there is to be any true progress in this twentieth century that will must be forthcoming. Among the nations it will

[1] For the present position in regard to the Reunion of Christendom, see *Lausanne* 1927, by E. S. Woods.

[2] The beginnings of what may be a world-wide co-operation of Christian Churches in regard to this was seen in the Stockholm Conference of 1925, and in the work of its Continuation Committee; and also in the work of an older organization, The World Alliance for the Promotion of International Friendship through the Churches.

be seen pre-eminently in a will to peace; in industry a will to justice and to a more real co-operation; in our social life a will to honesty and purity. Once more, summed up in the fullest meaning of the words, it is a Will to Love.

How is this will—this spiritual driving-power—to be produced? Not by Acts of Parliament nor by the measures of States; not even by a league of nations, nor by co-operative councils in industry; nor by the thousand social and philanthropic associations with which we are familiar. These are all eminently desirable and in some cases indispensable. The League of Nations, for example, is at present the only visible barrier between the world and a war whose devastating effects might easily prove the end of civilization as we know it. But what matters in this as in similar enterprises is the *temper of the people behind it*, that is, the presence, or absence, of that will to righteousness of which I spoke. This has only come, can only come, through the recognition of what is to many a new fact, the fact of God; for when men realize God, and what God is like, and what God wants done, they change their minds, and the formation begins of a public opinion (made

up of private opinions) which looks towards righteousness, peace, fellowship, and love.

This process has been going on steadily, though sometimes very slowly, ever since Christ came. The leaven of the Kingdom of Heaven has been working. But in a sense it has to be re-introduced into each succeeding generation, for its quality depends on the loyalty of the sons of God to the Father's plan, and upon their aggressive propaganda in making Him known. For, let me repeat it, to know God as unveiled in Christ is to be committed to Christ's scheme of life and to reproduce it (so far as it is within our power) within the framework of our own circumstances. Here is the root-weakness of the Church. By tens of thousands its members believe in Christ as the "image of God": they worship Christ Sunday after Sunday; but all too often they make little or no attempt to act on Christ's values; to insist on Christ's rights; to use Christ's resources. He said His men were to be "the salt of the earth." Too often they "lose their savour" through tame acquiescence with standards of life and habits of conduct which are supposed to be "inevitable." Whenever they refuse to be thus tamed, when-

ever the "sons of the Kingdom" bestir themselves, a fresh breeze begins to blow, the sun comes out—for a sense of God is like the sunshine—and the wilderness of dead-level life begins to "blossom as the rose." We have only to remember the moral effect produced by men like Francis of Assisi, or Hugh of Lincoln, or Lancelot Andrewes, or William Carey, or William Booth, or by groups like the Methodists or the leaders of the Oxford Movement, to see how true this is.

Therefore, the Church should be the working model of the Kingdom, the sphere where already life is "eternal" in its quality, the fellowship whose supreme concern is exhibiting the divine Family life at whatever cost of toil or pain in the arena of "this age." For this every son of God was "adopted." To this he was dedicated. For this he must pray and labour. For all the sons are "called" to go into the "Father's business" of redeeming the world, of re-making men. They are to be the purveyors of this immeasurable Love. This one will find the Father's business in the ministry at home; that one in the Christian hospital in Africa; another as an educationist in India; another in promoting the Father's King-

dom in Parliament or in the Town Council; others in medicine or in the law or in school or in business or in society. The fact is that every honest profession or occupation or sphere of life can be used by the sons to promote the Father's business, that is, the re-building of character and the bringing in of His Kingdom.

What is God like? He is like Jesus. Then I must worship. What is the world like? Like a disordered room that needs to be put straight. Then I must work. What am I like? A poor sinner, very unlike Christ; yet destined to be like Him. For He "loved me and gave Himself for me." Do we really know, reader, what God is like? We do know. We watch Christ, and we are certain. To know that is life's greatest joy and life's greatest responsibility. For God is Love.

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